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The Writings of

"FIONA MACLEOD"

UNIFORM EDITION

ARRANGED BY

MRS. WILLIAM SHARP

I too will set my face to the wind and throw my handful of seed on high.

—F. M.

Flora Macleod

Pharais

and

The Mountain Lovers

BY

"FIONA MACLEOD"

(WILLIAM SHARP)

NEW YORK

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"It is Loveliness I seek, not lovely things."

FOREWORD

INTO this collected edition are gathered all the writings of William Sharp published under his pseudonym "Fiona Macleod," which he cared to have preserved; writings characterised by the distinctive idiom he recognised to be the expression of one side of his very dual nature—of the spiritual, intuitive, subjective self as distinct from the mental, reasoning, objective self.

In the preparation of this edition I have carefully followed the author's written and spoken instructions as to selection, deletion, and arrangement. To the preliminary arrangement he gave much thought, especially to the revision of the text, and he made considerable changes in the later version of certain of the poems and tales. In one instance only have I acted on my own judgment, and have done so because I felt satisfied he would have offered no objection to my suggestion. In accordance with his decision the romance *Green Fire* is

not reissued in its entirety, because he considered the construction of it to be seriously defective. He rewrote the second half of the story—the only portion he cared to keep—renamed it " The Herdsman " and included it in *The Dominion of Dreams*. Scattered throughout *Green Fire* there are a number of " Thoughts " which I and other readers are desirous of preserving; I have therefore gathered them together and have included them in the form of detached " Fragments."

The *Laughter of Peterkin* is also excluded, because it is a retelling of old familiar Celtic tales and not primarily an original work. Two of these retellings, however, *Deirdre and the Sons of Usna*, and *The Four White Swans* have been published separately in America by Mr. Mosher (Portland, Maine).

Though the " Fiona Macleod " phase belongs to the last twelve years of William Sharp's life, the formative influences which prepared the way for it went back to childhood. Though " the pains and penalties of impecuniosity " during his early struggles in London tended temporarily to silence the intuitive subjective side of his nature in the necessary development of the more objective intellectual " William Sharp "—critic, biographer, essay and novel writer as well as

poet—he never lost sight of his desire to give expression to his other self.

William Sharp was born in 1855 of Scottish parents (he died at Maniace, Sicily, in 1905), was educated at the Academy and University of Glasgow, and spent much of his youth among the Gaelic-speaking fisher-folk and shepherds of the West Highlands. After a voyage to Australia for his health, he settled in London in 1878 and strove to make for himself a place in the profession of Literature. His friendships with Rossetti, Browning, Pater, Meredith were important factors in his development; and later he came into valued personal touch with W. D. Howells, Richard Stoddart, Edward Clarence Stedman, and other English and American men of letters.

In 1886, not long after his marriage, he suffered a serious illness and a protracted convalescence. During the enforced leisure he dreamed many dreams, saw visions, and remembered many things out of the past both personal and racial. He determined, should he recover, to bend every effort to ensure the necessary leisure wherein to write that which lay nearest his heart. Accordingly in 1889 he left London for a time. The first outcome of a wonderful winter and spring in Rome was a volume of verse, in unrhymed metre, *Sospiri*

di Roma, privately published in 1891, and followed in 1893 by a volume of dramatic interludes, *Vistas;* and, though both are a blending of the two elements of the poet's dual nature, they to some extent foreshadowed the special phase of work that followed. He was feeling his way, but did not find what he sought until he wrote *Pharais,* the first of the series of books which he issued under the pseudonym of "Fiona Macleod."

In the sunshine and quiet of a little cottage in Sussex; in the delight in "the green life" about him; impelled by the stimulus of a fine friendship, he had gone back to the influences of his early memories, and he began to give expression to his vision of the Beauty of the World, of the meaning of Life, of its joys and sorrows. The ultimate characteristic expression of his "dream self" was due to the inspiration and incentive of the friend to whom he dedicated *Pharais.* It was, as he states in a letter to me written in 1896, "to her I owe my development as 'Fiona Macleod,' though in a sense, of course, that began long before I knew her, and indeed while I was a child"; and again, "without her there would never have been any 'Fiona Macleod.'"

The volumes appeared in quick succession. *Pharais* in 1894; *The Mountain Lovers* in

1895; *The Sin-Eater* in 1895; *The Washer of the Ford* in 1896; *Green Fire* in 1896; *The Laughter of Peterkin* in 1897; *The Dominion of Dreams* in 1899; and a volume of poems, *From the Hills of Dream,* in 1896. A second serious illness intervened, and in 1900 he published *The Divine Adventure,* and in 1904 *The Winged Destiny.* Of his two dramas, written in 1898–9, *The House of Usna* was performed by the Stage Society in London in 1900, and was issued in book form in America by Mr. Mosher in 1903; *The Immortal Hour* was published in America in 1907 and in England in 1908. The volume of nature essays, *Where the Forest Murmurs,* and an enlarged edition of *From the Hills of Dream* were also published posthumously.

For twelve years the name of "Fiona Macleod" was one of the mysteries of contemporary literature. The question of "her" identity provoked discussion on both sides of the Atlantic; conjecture at times touched the truth and threatened disclosure. But the secret was loyally guarded by the small circle of friends in whom he had confided. "'Fiona' dies" he was wont to say, "should the secret be found out." These friends sympathised with and respected the author's desire to create for himself, by means of a pseudonym, the necessary

seclusion wherein to weave his dreams and visions into outward form; to write a series of Celtic poems, romances and essays different in character from the literary and critical work with which William Sharp had always approached his public.

In a letter to an American friend written in 1893, before he had decided on the use of the pseudonym, he relates: "I am writing a strange Celtic tale called *Pharais,* wherein the weird charm and terror of the night of tragic significance is brought home to the reader (or I hope so) by a stretch of dew-sweet moon-flowers glimmering white through the mirk of a dust laden with sea-mist. Though the actual scene was written a year ago and one or other of the first parts of *Pharais,* I am going to rewrite it." In 1895 he wrote to the same friend who had received a copy of the book, and who, remembering the statement, was puzzled by the name of the author: "Yes, *Pharais* is mine. It is a book out of the core of my heart. . . . Ignored in some quarters, abused in others, and unheeded by the general reader, it has yet had a reception that has made me deeply glad. It is the beginning of my true work. Only one or two know that I am 'Fiona Macleod.'" To the last the secret was carefully guarded for him, until he

passed "from the dream of Beauty to Beauty."

In the author's "Foreword" to the Tauchnitz selection of the Fiona Macleod Tales, entitled *Wind and Wave,* he has set down in explanation what here may be fittingly reprinted. He explains that in certain sections are tales of the old Gaelic and Celtic-Scandinavian life and mythology; that in others there is a blending of Paganism and Christianity; in others again "are tales of the dreaming imagination having their base in old mythology or in a kindred mythopœic source. . . . They divide broadly into tales of the world that was and tales of the world that is, because the colour and background of the one series are of a day that is past, and past not only for us, but for the forgetting race itself; while the colour and background of the other, if interchangeable, is not of a past, but only of a passing world which lies in essential truth in nature, material or spiritual, the truth of actual reality, and the truth of imaginative reality. . . .

"Many of these tales are of the grey wandering wave of the West, and through each goes the wind of the Gaelic spirit, which everywhere desires infinitude, but in the penury of things as they are turns upon itself to the dim enchantment of dreams. And what are these,

whether of a single heart on the braes of sorrow or of the weariness of unnumbered minds in the maze of time and fate, but the dreams of the wavering images of dreams, with which for a thousand years the Gael has met the ignominies and sorrows of a tragical destiny; the intangible merchandise which he continually creates and continually throws away, as the May wind gathers and scatters the gold of the broom."

ELIZABETH A. SHARP.

PHARAIS

A ROMANCE OF THE ISLES

"*Mithich domh triall gu tigh Pharais.*"
(It is time for me to go up unto the House of Paradise.)
Muireadhach Albannach.

"*How many beautiful things have come to us from Pharais.*"
"Bileag-na-Toscùil."

To

E. W. R.

Dear friend,—While you gratify me by your pleasure in this inscription, you modestly deprecate the dedication to you of this story of alien life—of that unfamiliar island-life so alien in all ways from the life of cities, and, let me add, from that of the great mass of the nation to which, in the communal sense, we both belong. But in the Domhan-Tòir of friendship there are resting-places where all barriers of race, training, and circumstance fall away in dust. At one of these places of peace we met, a long while ago, and found that we loved the same things, and in the same way. You have been in the charmed West yourself; have seen the gloom and shine of the mountains that throw their shadow on the sea: have heard the wave whisper along that haunted shore which none loves save with passion, and none, loving, can bear to be long parted from. You, unlike so many who de-

light only in the magic of sunshine and cloud, love this dear land when the mists drive across the hillsides, and the brown torrents are in spate, and the rain and the black wind make a gloom upon every loch, and fill with the dusk of storm every strath, and glen, and corrie. Not otherwise can one love it aright: "Tir nam Beann s'nan gleann' s'nan ghaisgach," *as one of our ancient poets calls it—"The land of hills, and glens, and heroes." You, too, like Deirdre of old, have looked back on "Alba," and, finding it passing fair and dear, have, with the Celtic Helen, said in your heart—*

> Inmain tir in tir ud thoir,
> Alba cona lingantaibh! . . .
> '*Belovéd is that eastern land,*
> *Alba of the lochs.*"

In the mythology of the Gael are three forgotten deities, children of Delbaith-Dana. These are Seithoir, Teithoir, and Keithoir. One dwells throughout the sea, and beneath the soles of the feet of another are the highest clouds; and these two may be held sacred for the beauty they weave for the joy of eye and ear. But now that, as surely none may gainsay, Keithoir is blind and weary, let us worship at his fane rather than give all our homage to the others. For Keithoir is the god

of the earth; dark-eyed, shadowy brother of Pan; and his fane is among the lonely glens and mountains and loneliest isles of "Alba cona lingantaibh." *It is because you and I are of the children of Keithoir that I wished to grace my book with your name.*

The most nature-wrought of the English poets hoped he was not too late in transmuting into his own verse something of the beautiful mythology of Greece. But while Keats spun from the inexhaustible loom of genius, and I am but an obscure chronicler of obscure things, is it too presumptuous of me to hope that here, and mayhap elsewhere, I, the latest comer among older and worthier celebrants and co-enthusiasts, likewise may do something, howsoever little, to win a further measure of heed for, and more intimate sympathy with, that old charm and stellar beauty of Celtic thought and imagination, now, alas, like so many other lovely things, growing more and more remote, discoverable seldom in books, and elusive amid the sayings and oral legends and fragmentary songs of a passing race?

A passing race: and yet, mayhap not so. Change is inevitable; and even if we could hear the wind blowing along Magh Mell—the Plain of Honey—we might list to a new note,

bitter-sweet: and, doubtless, the waves falling over the green roof of Tir-na-Thonn' murmur drowsily of a shifting of the veils of circumstance, which Keithoir weaves blindly in his dark place. But what was, surely is; and what is, surely may yet be. The form changes; the essential abides. As the saying goes among the isle-folk: The shadow fleets beneath the cloud driven by the wind, and the cloud falls in rain or is sucked of the sun, but the wind sways this way and that for ever. It may well be that the Celtic Dream is not doomed to become a memory merely. Were it so, there would be less joy in all Springs to come, less hope in all brown Autumns; and the cold of a deathlier chill in all Winters still dreaming by the Pole. For the Celtic joy in the life of Nature—the Celtic vision—is a thing apart: it is a passion; a visionary rapture. There is none like it among the peoples of our race.

Meanwhile, there are a few remote spots, as yet inviolate. Here, Anima Celtica still lives and breathes and hath her being. She dreams; but if she awake, it may not necessarily be to a deepening twilight, or to a forlorn passage to Tir Tairngire—that Land of Promise whose borders shine with the loveliness of all forfeited, or lost, or banished dreams and realities of Beauty. It may be that she will arise to a

wider sway, over a disfrontiered realm. Blue are the hills that are far from us. Dear saying of the Gael, whose soul as well as whose heart speaks therein. Far hills recede, recede! Dim veils of blue, woven from within and without, haunt us, allure us, always, always!

But now, before I send you my last word of greeting, let me add (rather for other readers than for you, who already know of them) a word concerning the Gaelic runes interpolated in Pharais.*

The " Urnuigh Smalaidh an Teine *" (p. 42) and "* Au t Altachadh Leapa *" (p. 43)—respectively a prayer to be said at covering up the peat-fire at bed-time and a Rest-blessing —are relics of ancient Celtic folklore which were sent to the Rev. Dr. Alexander Stewart, of "Nether Lochaber" fame, by Mr. A. A. Carmichael, of South Uist, who took them down from the recitation of a man living at Iocar of Uist. From the same Hebridean source came the "* Rann Buacbailleac," *or rune to be said over cattle when led to pasture at morn, introduced at p. 49. The English ver-*

** A slightly anglicised lection of the Gaelic word* Pàras = Paradise, *Heaven.* "Pharais," *properly, is the genitive and dative case of Pàras, as in the line from Muireadhach Albannach, quoted after the title page,* "Mithich domh triall gu tigh Pharais"—"*It is time for me to go up unto the House of Paradise.*"

sions, by Dr. Stewart, appeared first in "The Inverness Courier," *over twenty years ago. There are several versions current of the authentic incident of the innocent old woman held to be a witch, and of her prayer. I weave into my story the episode as I heard it many years ago, though with the rune rescued from oblivion by Dr. Stewart, rather than with the longer and commonly corrupted version still to be heard by the croft-fire in many localities, all "the far cry" from the Ord of Sutherland to the Rhinns of Islay. The* "Laoidh Mhnathan"—*the Chant of Women, at p. 100—is not ancient in the actual form here given, which is from an unpublished volume of* "Oràin' Spioradail."

The sweetest-voiced of the younger Irish singers of to-day has spoken of the Celtic Twilight. A twilight it is; but, if night follow gloaming, so also does dawn succeed night. Meanwhile, twilight voices are sweet, if faint and far, and linger lovingly in the ear.

There is another Pàras than that seen of Alastair of Innisròn—the Tir-Nan-Oigh of friendship. Therein we both have seen beautiful visions and dreamed dreams. Take, then, out of my heart, this book of vision and dream.

FIONA MACLEOD.

"O bileag-geal,
O bileag-na-Tosciùil, bileag Phòrais,
O tha e boidheach!
Tha e boidheach!"

Pharais

I

It was midway in the seventh month of her great joy that the child moved, while a rapture leaped to her heart, within the womb of Lora, daughter of the dead Norman Maclean, minister of Innisròn, in the Outer Isles.

On the same eve the cruel sorrow came to her that had lain waiting in the dark place beyond the sunrise.

Alastair, her so dearly beloved, had gone, three days earlier, by the Western Isles steamer, to the port of Greenock, thence to fare to Glasgow, to learn from a great professor of medicine concerning that which so troubled him—both by reason of what the islesmen whispered among themselves, and for what he felt of his own secret pain and apprehension.

There was a rocky spur on Innisròn, whence the watcher could scan the headland round which the *Clansman* would come on her

thrice-weekly voyage: in summer, while the isles were still steeped in the yellow shine; in autumn, when the sky seaward was purple, and every boulder in each islet was as transparent amber amid a vapour of amethyst rising from bases and hollow caverns of a cold day-dawn blue.

Hither Lora had come in the wane of the afternoon. The airs were as gentle and of as sweet balmy breath as though it were Summer-sleep rather than only the extreme of May. The girl looked, shading her eyes, seaward; and saw the blue of the midmost sky laid as a benediction upon the face of the deep, but paler by a little, as the darkest turquoise is pale beside the lightest sapphire. She lifted her eyes from the pearl-blue of the horizon to the heart of the zenith, and saw there the soul of Ocean gloriously arisen. Beneath the weedy slabs of rock whereon she stood, the green of the sea-moss lent a yellow gleam to the slow-waving dead-man's-hair which the tide laved to and fro sleepily, as though the bewitched cattle of Seumas the seer were drowsing there unseen, known only of their waving tails, swinging silently as the bulls dreamed of the hill-pastures they should see no more. Yellow-green in the sunlit spaces as the sea-hair was, it was dark against the shifting

green light of the water under the rocks, and till so far out as the moving blue encroached.

To Lora's right ran a curved inlet, ending in a pool fringed with dappled fronds of sea-fern, mare's-tails, and intricate bladder-wrack. In the clear hollow were visible the wave-worn stones at the bottom, many crowned with spreading anemones, with here and there a star-fish motionlessly agleam, or a cloud of vanishing shrimps above the patches of sand, or hermit crabs toiling cumbrously from perilous shelter to more sure havens. Looking down she saw herself, as though her wraith had suddenly crept therein and was waiting to whisper that which, once uttered and once heard, would mean disunion no more.

Slipping softly to her knees, she crouched over the pool. Long and dreamily she gazed into its depths. What was this phantasm, she wondered, that lay there in the green-gloom as though awaiting her? Was it, in truth, the real Lora, and she but the wraith?

How strangely expressionless was that pale face, looking upward with so straightforward a mien, yet with so stealthy an understanding, with dark abysmal eyes filled with secrecy and dread, if not, indeed, with something of menace.

A thrill of fear went to the girl's heart. A

mass of shadow had suddenly obscured her image in the water. Her swift fancy suggested that her wraith had abruptly shrouded herself, fearful of revelation. The next moment she realised that her own wealth of dark hair had fallen down her neck and upon her shoulders—hair dusky as twilight, but interwrought with threads of bronze that, in the shine of fire or sun, made an evasive golden gleam.

She shuddered as she perceived the eyes of her other self intently watching her through that cloudy shadow. A breath came from the pool, salt and shrewd, and cold as though arisen from those sea-sepulchres whence the fish steal their scales of gold and silver. A thin voice was in her ears that was not the lap of the tide or the cluck of water gurgling in and out of holes and crannies.

With a startled gesture she shrank back.

"What is it? What is it?" she cried; but the sound of her own awed voice broke the spell: and almost at the same moment an eddy of wind came circling over the rock-bastions of the isle, and, passing as a tremulous hand over the pool, ruffled it into a sudden silvery sheen.

With a blithe laugh, Lora rose to her feet. The sunlight dwelt about her as though she

were the sweetest flower in that lost garden of Aodh the poet, where the streams are unspanned rainbows flowing to the skyey cauldrons below the four quarters, and where every white flower has at dusk a voice, a whisper, of surpassing sweetness.

"O Alastair, Alastair!" she cried, "will the boat never be coming that is to bring you back to me!"

Not a black spot anywhere, of wherry or steamer, caught the leaping gaze. Like a bird it moved across the sea, and found no object whereon to alight.

The *Clansman* was often late; but her smoke could be seen across Dunmore Head nigh upon quarter of an hour before her prow combed the froth from the Sound.

With a sigh, the girl moved slowly back by the way she had come. Over and over, as she went, she sang, crooningly, lines from a sweet song of the Gael, *O, Till, a Leannain!*

As she passed a place of birchen undergrowth and tall bracken, she did not see an old man, seated, grey and motionless as a heron. He looked at her with the dull eyes of age, though there was pity in them and something of a bewildered awe.

"Ay," he muttered below his breath,

" though ye sing for your dear one to return, ye know not what I know. Have I not had the vision of him with the mist growin' up an' up, an' seen the green grass turn to black mools at his feet?"

Lora, unwitting, passed; and he heard her voice wax and wane, as falling water in a glen where the baffled wind among the trees soughs now this way and now that:—

"*Mo chridhe-sa! 's tusa 'bhios truagh, 'bhios truagh,*
Mur pill is' 'thog oirre gu cluaidh, gu cluaidh!"

She went past the boulder on the path that hid the clachan from view, and within a net-throw of which was the byre of Mrs. Maclean's cottage, where, since her father's death, she had dwelt.

A tall, gaunt, elderly woman, with hair of the ivory white of the snowberry, was about to pass from behind the byre with a burthen of fresh bracken for Ian Maclean's bed—for the old islesman abode by the way of his fathers, and was content to sleep on a deerskin spread upon fresh-gathered fern—when she caught sight of Lora. She stopped, and with an eager glance looked at the girl: then beyond, and finally seaward, with her long, thin, brown arm at an angle, and her hand

curved over her eyes against the glare of the water.

Silence was about her as a garment. Every motion of her, even, suggested a deep calm. Mrs. Maclean spoke seldom, and when she said aught it was in a low voice, sweet and serene, but as though it came from a distance and in the twilight. She was of the shadow, as the islesmen say; and strangers thought her to be austere in look and manner, though that was only because she gazed long before she replied to one foreign to her and her life: having the Gaelic, too, so much more natively than the English, that oftentimes she had to translate the one speech into the other nearer to her: that, and also because the quiet of the sea was upon her, as often with hill-folk there is a hushed voice and mien.

Lora knew what was in her mind when she saw her gaze go seaward and then sweep hither and thither like a hawk ere it settles.

"The boat is not yet in sight, Mary; she is late," she said simply: adding immediately, "I have come back to go up Cnoc-an-Iolair; from there I'll see the smoke of the *Clansman* sooner. She is often as late as this."

Mrs. Maclean looked compassionately at the girl.

"Mayhap the *Clansman* will not be coming this way at all to-night, Lora. She may be going by Kyle-na-Sith."

A flush came into Lora's face. Her eyes darkened, as a tarn under rain.

"And for why should she not be sailing this way to-night, when Alastair is coming home, and is to be here before sundown?"

"He may have been unable to leave. If he does not come to-day, he will doubtless be here to-morrow."

"To-morrow! O Mary, Mary, have you ever loved, that you can speak like that? Think what Alastair went away for! Surely you do not know how the pain is at my heart?"

"Truly, *mùirnean*. But it is not well to be sure of that which may easily happen otherwise."

"To-morrow, indeed! Why, Mary, if the *Clansman* does not come by this evening, and has gone as you say by Kyle-na-Sith, she will not be here again till the day *after* to-morrow!"

"Alastair could come by the other way, by the Inverary boat, and thence by the herring-steamer from Dunmore, after he had reached it from Uan Point or by way of Craig-Sionnach."

"That may be, of course; but I think not. I cannot believe the boat will not be here to-night."

Both stood motionless, with their hands shading their eyes, and looking across the wide Sound, where the tide bubbled and foamed against the slight easterly wind-drift. The late sunlight fell full upon them, working its miracle of gold here and there, and making the skin like a flower. The outline of each figure stood out darkly clear as against a screen of amber.

For a time neither spoke. At last, with a faint sigh, Mrs. Maclean turned.

"Did you see Ian on your way, *Lora-mo-ghràidh?*"

"No."

"Do not have speech with the old man to-night, dear one. He is not himself."

"Has he had the sight again?"

"Ay, Lora."

Again a silence fell. The girl stood moodily, with her eyes on the ground: the elder watched her with a steadfast, questioning look.

"Mary!"

Mrs. Maclean made no reply, but her eyes brought Lora's there with the answer that was in them.

"Ian has never had the sight again upon . . . upon Alastair, has he?"

"How can I say?"

"But do you know if he has? If you do not tell me, I will ask him."

"I asked him that only yester-morning. He shook his head."

"Do you believe he can foresee all that is to happen?"

"No. Those who have the vision do not read all that is in the future. Only God knows. They can see the thing of peril, ay, and the evil of accident, and even Death—and what is more, the nearness and sometimes the way of it. But no man sees more than this—unless, indeed, he has been to Tir-na-h'Oigh."

Mrs. Maclean spoke the last words almost in a whisper, and as though she said them in a dream.

"Unless he has been to Tir-na-h'Oigh, Mary?"

"So it is said. Our people believe that the Land of Eternal Youth lies far yonder across the sea; but Aodh, the poet, is right when he tells us that that land is lapped by no green waves such as we know here, and that those who go thither do so in sleep, or in vision, or when God has filled with dusk the house of the brain."

"And when a man has been to Tir-na-h'Oigh in sleep, or in dream, or in mind-dark, does he see there what shall soon happen here?"

"It is said.'

"Has Ian been beyond the West?"

"No."

"Then what he sees when he has the sight upon him is not *beannaichte:* is not a thing out of heaven?"

"I cannot say. I think not."

"Mary, is it the truth you are now telling me?"

A troubled expression came into the woman's face, but she did not answer.

"And is it the truth, Mary, that Ian has not had the sight upon Alastair since he went away—that he did not have it last night or this morning?"

Lora leaned forward in her anxiety. She saw that in her companion's eyes which gave her the fear. But the next moment Mrs. Maclean smiled.

"I too have the sight, *Lora-mo-ghràidh;* and shall I be telling you that which it will be giving you joy to hear?"

"Ay, surely, Mary!"

"Then I think you will soon be in the arms of him you love"—and, with a low laugh, she

pointed across the sea to where a film of blue-grey smoke rose over the ridge of Dunmore headland.

"Ah, the *Clansman!*" cried Lora, with a gasp of joy: and the next moment she was moving down the path again toward the little promontory.

The wind had risen slightly. The splash, splash, of the sunny green waves against each other, the lapping of the blue water upon the ledges to the east, the stealthy whisper where the emerald-green tide-flow slipped under the hollowed sandstone, the spurtle of the sea-wrack, the flashing fall and foam-send of the gannets, the cries of the gulls, the slap of wind as it came over the forehead of the isle and struck the sea a score of fathoms outward—all gave her a sense of happiness. The world seemed suddenly to have grown young. The exultant Celtic joy stood over against the brooding Celtic shadow, and believed the lances of the sunlight could keep at bay all the battalions of gloom.

The breeze was variable, for the weft of blue smoke which suddenly curled round the bend of Dunmore had its tresses blown seaward, though where Lora stood the wind came from the west, and even caused a white foam along the hither marge of the promontory.

With eager eyes she watched the vessel round the point. After all, it was just possible she might not be the *Clansman.*

But the last sunglow shone full against Dunmore and upon the bows of the steamer as she swung to the helm; and the moment the red funnel changed from a dusky russet into a flame of red, Lora's new anxiety was assuaged. She knew every line of the boat, and already she felt Alastair's kisses on her lips. The usual long summer-gloaming darkened swiftly; for faint films of coming change were being woven across the span of the sky from mainland oceanward. Even as the watcher on Innisròn stood, leaning forward in her eager outlook, she saw the extreme of the light lift upward as though it were the indrawn shaft of a fan. The contours of the steamer grew confused: a velvety duskiness overspread Dunmore foreland.

The sky overhead had become a vast lift of perishing yellow—a spent wave of daffodil by the north and by the south; westward, of lemon, deepening into a luminous orange glow shot with gold and crimson, and rising as an exhalation from hollow cloud-sepulchres of amethyst, straits of scarlet, and immeasurable spaces of dove-grey filled with shallows of the most pale sea-green.

Lora stood as though wrought in marble. She had seen that which made the blood leap from her heart, and surge in her ears, and clamour against her brain.

No pennon flew at the peak of the steamer's foremast. This meant there was neither passenger nor freight to be landed at Innisròn, so that there was no need for the ferry.

She could scarcely believe it possible that the *Clansman* could come, after all, and yet not bring Alastair back to her. It seemed absurd: some ill-timed by-play; nay, a wanton cruelty. There must be some mistake, she thought, as she peered hungrily into the sea-dusk.

Surely the steamer was heading too much to the northward! With a cry, Lora instinctively stretched her arms toward the distant vessel; but no sound came from her lips, for at that moment a spurt of yellow flame rent the gray gloom, as a lantern was swung aloft to the mast-head.

In a few seconds she would know all; for whenever the *Clansman* was too late for her flag-signal to be easily seen, she showed a green light a foot or so beneath the yellow.

Lora heard the heavy pulse of the engines, the churn of the beaten waves, even the delir-

ious surge and suction as the spent water was driven along the hull and poured over and against the helm ere it was swept into the wake that glimmered white as a snow-wreath. So wrought was she that, at the same time, she was keenly conscious of the rapid *tweet-tweet-tweet-tweet-tweet — o-o-h sweet! — sweet!* of a yellow-hammer among the whin close by, and of the strange, mournful cry of an oyster-opener as it flew with devious swoops toward some twilight eyrie.

The throb of the engines—the churn of the beaten waves—the sough of the swirling yeast —even the churning, swirling, under-tumult, and through it and over it the heavy pulse, the deep panting rhythmic throb: this she heard, as it were the wrought surge of her own blood.

Would the green light never swing up to that yellow beacon?

A minute passed: two minutes: three! It was clear that the steamer had no need to call at Innisròn. She was coming up the mid of the Sound, and, unless the ferry-light signalled to her to draw near, she would keep her course north-westward.

Suddenly Lora realised this. At the same time there flashed into her mind the idea that perhaps Alastair was on board after all, but that he was ill, and had forgotten to tell

the captain of his wish to land by the island ferry.

She turned, and, forgetful or heedless of her condition, moved swiftly from ledge to ledge, and thence by the path to where, in the cove beyond the clachan, the ferry-boat lay on the tide-swell, moored by a rope fastened to an iron clank fixed in a boulder.

"Ian! Ian!" she cried, as she neared the cove; but at first she saw no one, save Mrs. Maclean, black against the fire-glow from her cottage. "Ian! Ian!"

A dark figure rose from beside the ferry-shed.

"Is that you, Ian? *Am bheil am bhàta deas?* Is the boat ready? *Bi ealamh! bi ealamh! mach am bhàta:* quick! quick! out with the boat!"

In her eager haste she spoke both in the Gaelic and the English: nor did she notice that the old man did not answer her, or make any sign of doing as she bade him.

"Oh, Ian, bi ealamh! bi ealamh! Faigh am bhàta deas! rach a stigh do'n bhàta!"

Word for word, as is the wont of the people, he answered her:—

"Why is it that I should be quick? Why should I be getting the boat ready? For what should I be going into the boat?"

"The *Clansman!* Do you not see her? *Bi calamh; bi calamh!* or she will go past us like a dream."

"She has flown no flag, she has no green light at the mast. No one will be coming ashore, and no freight; and there is no freight to go from here, and no one who wants the ferry unless it be yourself, *Lora nighean Tormaid!*"

"Alastair is there: he was to come by the steamer to-day! Be quick, Ian! Do you hear me?"

"I hear," said the old man, as he slowly moved toward the boulder to his left, unloosed the rope from the iron clank, and drew the boat into the deep water alongside the landing-ledge.

"There is no good in going out, *Lora bhàn!* The wind is rising: ay, I tell you, the wind goes high: we may soon hear the howling of the sea-dogs."

But Lora, taking no notice, had sprung into the boat, and was already adjusting the long oars to the old-fashioned wooden thole-pins. Ian followed, grumblingly repeating, "*Tha gaoth ruhòr am! Tha coltas stairm' air!*"

Once, however, that the wash of the sea caught the wherry, and the shrewd air sent the salt against their faces, the old man appeared to realise that the girl was in earnest.

Standing, he laid hold of the sloped mast, to steady himself against the swaying as the tide sucked at the keel and the short waves slapped against the bows, and then gave a quick calculating glance seaward and at the advancing steamer.

Rapidly he gave his directions to Lora to take the helm and to keep the boat to windward:

" Gabh an stiuir, Lora: cum ris a' ghàoth i!"

The next moment the long oars were moving slowly, but powerfully, through the water, and the ferry-boat drove into the open, and there lay over a little with the double swing of wind and tide.

The gloaming was now heavy upon the sea; for a mist had come up with the dipping of the sun, and thickened the dusk.

Suddenly Ian called to Lora to hold the oars. As soon as she had caught them, and was steadying the boat in the cross surge of the water, he lifted a lantern from under the narrow fore-deck, lighted the wick below the seat (after the wind had twice blown the flame into the dark), and then, gripping the mast, waved the signal to and fro overhead.

It was well he thought of this, for the steamer was going at full speed, and would not have slackened.

In a few minutes thereafter the heavy stertorous throb and splash was close by them, while the screw revolved now at quarter-speed.

A hoarse voice came from the *Clansman:*

"Ferry ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, ta ferry she will pe," called back Ian in the quaint English of which he was so proud: though he thought the language a poor, thin speech, and fit only for folk who never left the mainland.

"What are ye oot for, Ian? Ha' ye ony body comin' aboard?"

"We've come out for Mr. Alastair Macleod," Lora broke in eagerly: "we've come to take him off."

"Hoots, my girl, what for d'ye fash yersel an' us too for the like o' sic havers. There's no one aboard who wants to land at Innisròn: an' as for Alastair Macleod, he was na' on the *Clansman* when we left Greenock, so he could na' well be on her the now! As for you, Ian Maclean, are ye doited, when, wi' neither flag nor green light aloft, ye stop the steamer like this, a' for a lassie's haverin'! Ye'll hear o' this yet, my man, I'se telling ye! Auld fule that ye are, awa' wi' ye! keep aff the wash o' the steamer: . . . an' by the Lord, I'll . . ."

But already the *Clansman* was forging

ahead, and the second-officer's menace was swallowed up in the tumult of churned seas.

A minute later the steamer was a dark mass to the nor'-west, with a sheet of white writhing after her, and a swirl of flaming cinders from her funnel riding down the night like a shoal of witch-lights.

The wherry rocked heavily, caught as she was in the surge from the screw, and lying adrift in the sliding hollows and rough criss-cross of the waves.

Lora sat motionless and speechless. The old man stared down into the darkness of the boat: but though his lips moved continuously, no sound came from them.

For a time it was as though a derelict were the sport of the sea, which had a dull moan in it, that partly was from the stifled voice of the tide as it forced its way from the cauldrons of the deep, and partly from the fugitive clamour of breaking waves, and mostly from the now muffled, now loud and raucous sough of the wind as it swung low by the surge, or trailed off above the highest reach of the flying scud.

At last, in a whisper, the girl spoke.

"Ian, has aught of evil come to Alastair?"

"God forbid!"

"Do you know anything to his undoing?"

"No, *Lora bhàn*."

"You have not had the sight upon him lately?"

The islesman hesitated a moment. Raising his eyes at last, he glanced first at his companion and then out into the dusk across the waves, as though he expected to see some one or something there in answer to his quest.

"I dreamt a dream, Lora, wife of Alastair. I saw you and him and another go away into a strange place. You and the other were as shadows; but Alastair was a man, as now, though he walked through mist, and I saw nothing of him but from the waist upward."

Silence followed this, save for the wash of the sea, the moan of wind athwart wave, and the soft rush of the breeze overhead.

Ian rose, and made as though he were going to put out the oars; but as he saw how far the boat had drifted from the shore, and what a jumble of water lay between them and the isle, he busied himself with hoisting the patched brown sail.

As if no interval had occurred, Lora abruptly called him by name.

"Ian," she added, "what does the mist mean? . . . the mist that you saw about the feet and up to the waist of Alastair?"

There was no reply. Ian let go the sail,

secured it, and then seated himself a few feet away from Lora.

She repeated the question: but the old man was obstinately silent, nor did he speak word of any kind till the wherry suddenly slackened, as she slipped under the lee of the little promontory of the landing-place.

"The tide will be on turning now," he exclaimed in his awkward English, chosen at the moment because he did not dare to speak in the Gaelic, fearful as he was of having any further word with his companion; "and see, after all, the wind she will soon pe gone."

Lora, who had mechanically steered the boat to its haven, still sat in the stern, though Ian had stepped on to the ledge and was holding the gunwale close to it so that she might step ashore with ease. She looked at him as though she did not understand. The old man shifted uneasily. Then his conscience smote him for having used the cold, unfriendly English instead of the Gaelic so dear to them both: for was not the girl in the shadow of trouble, and did he not foresee for her more trouble to come? So, in a gentle, apologetic voice, he repeated in Gaelic what he had said about the tide and the wind:

"*Thill an sruth: Dh' fhalbh a' ghàoth.*

"There will be peace to-night," he added.

"It was but a sunset breeze, after all. There will be no storm. I think now there will be a calm. It will be bad for the herring-boats. It is a long pull and a hard pull when the water sleeps against the keel. A dark night, too, most likely."

Lora rose, and slowly stepped on shore. She took no notice of Ian's sudden garrulity. She did not seem to see him even.

He looked at her with momentary resentment: but almost simultaneously a pitiful light came into his eyes.

"He will be here to-morrow," he murmured, "and if not, then next day for sure."

Lora moved up the ledge in silence.

In the middle of the cove she stopped, waved her hand, and, in a dull voice bidding good-night, wished sound sleep to him:

"Beannachd leibh! Cadal math dhiubh!"

Ian answered simply, *"Beannachd leibh!"* and turned to fasten the rope to the iron clamp.

The dew was heavy, even on the rough salt spear-grass which fringed the sand above the cove. On the short sheep-grass, on the rocky soil beyond, it was dense, and shone white as a shroud in a dark room. A bat swung this way and that, whirling silently. The fall of the wind still sighed in the bent rowan trees to the west of the clachan, where the pathway

diverged from the shore. Against the bluff of Cnoc-an-Iolair it swelled intermittently: its voice in the hollows and crevices of the crag broken up in moans and short gasps, fainter and fainter.

Lora noted all this wearily as she advanced. She was conscious, also, of the nibbling of the sheep, quenching their thirst with the wet grass: of the faint swish of her feet going through the dew: of the dark track, like a crack in black ice, made wherever she walked in the glisten. But though she saw and unwittingly noted, her thoughts were all with Alastair and with what had kept him.

In her remote life there was scarce room for merely ordinary vicissitudes. It was not a thing to ponder as ominous that one should go out to sea after herring or mackerel and not return that night or the morrow, or even by the next gloaming, or second dawn; or that a man should go up among the hills and not come back for long after his expected hour. But that one could miss the great steamer was a thing scarce to believe in. To Lora, who had been so little on the mainland, and whose only first-hand knowledge of the feverish life of towns was derived from her one winter of school-life at Rothesay and brief visits to Greenock and Oban, it was difficult to realise

how any one could fail to leave by the steamer, unless ill or prevented by some serious mischance. The periodical coming of the *Clansman* symbolised for her, to a certain extent, the inevitable march of time and fate. To go or come by that steam-driven, wind-heedless vessel was to be above the uncertainties and vicissitudes to which ordinary wayfaring mortals are subject. The girl thought she knew so much that to her all of what town-life meant must be bare, because of her reading: knowing not that, with a woman whose heart aches, a tear will drown every word writ in any book, a sigh scatter the leaves into nothingness.

Deep was the puzzle to her as she slowly ascended the path which led to Mary Maclean's cottage. She stopped once or twice, half unconsciously, to smell the fragrance of the bog-myrtle where the gale grew in tufts out of the damper patches, or of the thyme as it was crushed under her feet and made oversweet, over-poignant by the dew.

The peat-reek reached her nostrils from the cottage, blent with the breaths of the cows that still loitered afoot, munching the cool wilding fodder. Her gaze, too, fell upon the fire-lit interior, with a table overspread by a white cloth, flushed by the glow that wavered

from betwixt the red-hot bars; and, later, upon the figure of Mrs. Maclean, who had come out to meet her, or, more likely, had been there ever since the ferry-boat had gone off upon its useless errand.

"Are you wet, Lora? Are you cold?" she asked, as the girl drew near. There was no need to say aught of the bitter disappointment, any more than to speak of the glooming of the dusk: both were obvious facts beyond the yea or nay of speech.

"I am very tired, Mary."

"Come in, dear, and have your tea. It will do you good. *Lora-mo-ghràidh*, you should not have gone out in the ferry-boat. It was no use, and the sea was rough, and you might have come to harm; and what would Alastair Macleod be saying, to-morrow, if he found his heart's-delight ill, and that I had stood by and seen her do so foolish a thing?"

"Oh, Mary, do you really think he will be here to-morrow?"

"Surely."

"But I fear he will wait now till the next sailing of the *Clansman*."

"We cannot say. Come in, my fawn, out of the chill."

"It is going to be a lovely night. The wind falls fast; even now it is almost still. The

purple peace will be upon everything to-night. I am restless: I do not wish to go indoors."

"No, no, Lora dear to me! Come in and have your tea, and then rest. You can rise at daybreak, if you will, and go round the island, lest he should be coming in any of the herring-smacks."

"I want to speak to Ian."

"Ian has gone across to Ivor Maquay's; he will not be here to-night."

Lora looked suspiciously at the speaker. Had she not left Ian a few minutes ago, and was he not even now following her? She stared about her, but saw no one. In the gloaming she could just descry the black mass of the wherry. Ian was nowhere visible. She did not think of scrutinising the shadow of the beached and long disused coble which lay a few yards away. Had she done so, she might have perceived the old islesman standing rigid. He had overheard his kinswoman, and understood. As soon as the two women had entered the cottage, he moved swiftly and silently away, and, traversing the clachan, was soon swallowed up of the darkness.

After the meal was ended, Lora found herself overworn with excitement. All wish to go out again went from her. From where she lay resting, she watched Mrs. Maclean put

away the things and then seat herself by the fire.

For a long time neither woman spoke. A drowsy peace abode upon the threshold.

The hot red glow of the peats shone steadily.

At first there had been a little lamp on the table, but after a time Mrs. Maclean had extinguished it. Instead, she had thrown upon the fire a log of pinewood. The dry crackle, the spurt of the sap as it simmered in the heat, the yellow tongues and sudden red fangs and blue flames, gave the sound and glow whereof a sweeter silence can be wrought into what has been but stillness before.

An hour went by. With brief snatches of talk, all made up of fears and hopes, another hour passed. Then a long quietness again, broken at the last by a low crooning song from the elder woman, as she leaned to the fire and stared absently into its heart. The song was old: older than the oldest things, save the summits of the mountains, the granite isles, and the brooding pain of the sea. Long ago it had been sung by wild Celtic voices, before ever spoken word was writ in letters—before that again, mayhap, and caught perhaps from a wailing Pictish mother—so ancient was the moving old-world strain, so antique the words of the lullaby that was dim with age when it

soothed to sleep the child Ossian, son of Fingal.

When the crooning died away, Lora slept. With soft step Mrs. Maclean moved across the room, and lightly dropped a plaid over the girl's figure, recumbent in beautiful ease upon the low bed-couch.

She returned slowly to her place by the fire. After a while she was about to seat herself, when she started violently. Surely that was a face pressed for a moment against the window?

With a strange look in her eyes, she reproved herself for her nervous folly. She sat down, with gaze resolutely fixed on the glowing peats: nor would she have stirred again, but for a sound as of a low moan.

The blood ran chill in her veins; her mouth twitched; and the intertwisted fingers of her hands were white and lifeless with the fierce grip that came of her fear.

But she was not a woman to be mastered by terror. With a quivering sigh she rose, looked round the room, forced herself to stare fixedly at the window, and then moved quietly to the door.

As soon as she felt the air upon her brows she became calm, and all dread left her.

"Is that you, Ian?" she whispered.

There was no one visible; no sound.

"Is that you, Alastair Macleod?"

So low was the utterance that, if any one had been there, he could scarce have heard it.

To her strained ears it was as though she heard a light susurrus of brushed dew: but it might be a wandering breath of air among the gale, or an adder moving through the grass, or a fern-owl hawking under the rowan-trees.

She waited a little; then, with a sigh of relief, re-entered the cottage and closed the door.

A glance at Lora showed her that the girl was sleeping unperturbed. For some time there after she sat by the fire, brooding over many things. Weary, at last, she rose, cast a farewell glance at the sleeper, and then slipped quietly to her bed in the adjoining room.

Night lay passively upon the sea, upon the isle, upon the clachan. Not a light lingered in any cottage, save the fire-glow in that of Mary Maclean: a hollow, attenuating beam that stared through the dark unwaveringly.

Neither star nor moon was visible. The clouds hung low, but without imminence of rain for the isles, drawn inland as the vapours were by the foreheads of the bens.

An hour later the door of the cottage opened and closed again, silently. It was Lora who came forth.

She walked hesitatingly at first, and then more swiftly, not pausing till she reached the little boulder-pier. There she stood motionless, listening intently.

The water lapped among the hollows, above which the ebb-left shellfish gaped thirstily. There was a lift among the dulse-heaps, as though a finger stirred them and let loose their keen salt smells. The bladder-wrack moved with strange noises, sometimes startlingly loud, oftenest as if sea-things were being stifled or strangled.

From the promontory came a cry: abrupt, strident—the hunger-note of a skua. The thin pipe of the dotterel fell into the darkness beyond the shallows where the sea-mist lay. In the Kyle a muffled, stertorous breath, near and twice as far away, told that two whales were in the wake of the mackerel.

From the isle, no sound. The sheep lay on the thyme, or among the bracken, still as white boulders. The kye crouched, with misty nostrils laid low to the damp grass, rough with tangled gale. The dogs were silent. Even the tufted canna hung straight and motionless. The white moths had, one by one, fallen like

a fallen feather. The wind-death lay upon all: at the last, too, upon the sea.

II

Slowly, as though a veil were withdrawn, the cloudy dusk passed from the lift. The moon, lying in violet shadow, grew golden: while the sheen of her pathway, trailed waveringly across the sea and athwart the isle, made Innisròn seem as a beautiful body motionlessly adrift on the deep.

One by one the stars came forth—solemn eyes watching for ever the white procession move onward orderly where there is neither height, nor depth, nor beginning, nor end.

In the vast stellar space the moon-glow waned until it grew cold, white, ineffably remote. Only upon our little dusky earth, upon our restless span of waters, the light descended in a tender warmth. Drifting upon the sea, it moved tremulously onward, weaving the dark waters into a weft of living beauty.

Strange murmur of ocean, even when deep calm prevails, and not the most homeless wind lifts a weary wing from wave-gulf to wave-gulf. As a voice heard in dream; as a whisper

in the twilight of one's own soul; as a breath, as a sigh from one knows not whence, heard suddenly and with recognising awe; so is this obscure, troublous echo of a tumult that is over, that is not, but that may be, that awaiteth.

To Lora it was almost inaudible. Rather, her ears held no other sound than the babbling repetitive chime and whisper of the lip of the sea moving to and fro the pebbles on the narrow strand just beyond her.

Her eyes saw the lift of the dark, the lovely advance of the lunar twilight, the miracle of the yellow bloom—golden here and here white as frost-fire—upon sea and land: they saw, and yet saw not. Her ears heard the muffled voice of ocean and the sweet recurrent whispering of the foam-white runnels beside her: they heard, and yet heard not.

Surely, in the darkness, in the loneliness, she would have knowledge of Alastair. Surely, she thought, he would come to her in the spirit. In deep love there is a living invisible line from soul to soul whereby portent of joy or disaster, or passion of loneliness, or passion of fear, or passion of longing may be conveyed with terrifying surety.

How beyond words dreadful was this remoteness which environed her, as the vast

dome of night to a single white flower growing solitary in a waste place.

Inland upon the isle, seaward, skyward, Lora looked with aching eyes. The moonlight wounded her with its peace. The shimmering sea beat to a rhythm atune to a larger throb than that of a petty human life. In the starry infinitude her finitude was lost, absorbed, as a grain of sand wind-blown a few yards across an illimitable desert.

That passionate protest of the soul against the absolute unheed of nature was hers: that already defeated revolt of the whirling leaf against the soaring, far-come, far-going wind that knows nothing of what happens beneath it in the drift of its inevitable passage.

With a sob, she turned, vaguely yearning for the human peace that abode in the cottage. As she moved, she saw a shadow, solidly clear-cut in the moonlight, sweep from a rock close by, as though it were a swinging scythe.

Instinctively she glanced upward, to see if the cloud-counterpart were overhead. The sky was now cloudless: neither passing vapour nor travelling wild-swan had made that shadow leap from the smooth boulder into the darkness.

She trembled: for she feared she had seen the Watcher of the Dead. At the wane of

the last moon, an old islesman had passed into the white sleep. Lora knew that his spirit would have to become the Watcher of Graves till such time as another soul should lapse into the silence. Was this he, she wondered with instinctive dread—was this Fergus, weary of his vigil, errant about the isle which had been the world to him, a drifting shadow from graveyard to byre and sheiling, from fold to dark fold, from the clachan-end to the shore-pastures, from coble to havened coble, from the place of the boats to the ferry-rock? Did he know that he would soon have one to take over from him his dreadful peace? Or was he in no satiate peace, but anhungered as a beast of prey for the death of another? And then . . . and then . . . who was this other? Who next upon the isle would be the Watcher of the Dead?

With a low, shuddering breath, she sighed, "*Fergus!*"

The fall of her voice through the silence was an echo of terror. She clasped her hands across her breast. Her body swayed forward as a bulrush before the wind.

"*Ah, Dia! Dia!*" broke from her lips; for, beyond all doubt, she saw once again the moving of a darkness within the dark.

Yet what she saw was no shadow-man

weary of last vigil, but something that for a moment filled her with the blindness of dread. Was it possible? Was she waylaid by one of those terrible dwellers in twilight-water of which she had heard so often from the tellers of old tales?

"*Toradh nu féudalach gun am faicinn,*" she muttered with cold lips: "the offspring of the cattle that have not been seen!"

"Ah, no, no!" she cried. The next moment, and with a sob of relief, she saw a moonbeam steal upon the hollow and reveal its quietude of dusk. She would have moved at once from boulder to boulder, eager for that lost sanctuary whence she had come—when the very pulse of her heart sprang to the burst of a human sob close by.

She stood still, as though frozen. A moment before, the breath from her lips was visible: now not the faintest vapour melted into the night-air.

Was she dreaming, she wondered, when the stifling grip at her heart had mercifully relaxed?

No: there was no mistake. Blent with the gurgle and cluck and whisper of the water among the lifted bladder-wrack and in and out of the pools and crannies in the rocks, there was the piteous sound of a human sob.

All at once, everything became clear to Lora. She knew that Alastair was near: she did not even dread that he was present as a disembodied spirit. He had reached the isle after all, but in some strange sorrow had not sought her straightway.

"*Alastair!*" she cried yearningly.

No one answered; no one stirred; nothing moved. But the muffled sobbing was hushed.

"Alastair! Alastair!"

Slowly from a sand-drift beside the ferry-rock a tall figure arose. For a few moments it stood motionless, black against the yellow shine of the moon. The face was pale; that of a man, young, with the thin lips, the shadowy eyes that in sunlight would shine sea-blue, the high oval features, the tangled, curly, yellow-tawny hair of the islesmen of the ancient Suderöer, in whose veins the Celtic and the Scandinavian strains commingle.

Alastair was as visible as though he were in the noon-light.

Lora looked at him, speechless. She saw that in his strained eyes, in his wrought features, which told her he had drunken of sorrow. His dishevelled hair, his whole mien and appearance showed that he was in some dire extremity.

"*Alastair!*"

He heard the low, passionate appeal, but at first he did not stir. Then, and yet as though constrainedly and in weariness, he raised and stretched forth his arms.

Swift as a gliding shadow, Lora was beside him, and clasped to his heart.

For a time, neither spoke. His heart beat loud and heavily: against his breast her head lay, with her breath coming and going like a wounded bird panting in the green-gloom of the thicket.

"O Alastair, Alastair, what is it?" she murmured at last, raising her head and looking into his pale, distraught face.

"What made you come out in the dark, *Lora-mùirnean?*"

"I could not rest. I was too unhappy. I thought—I thought—no, I do not think I dared to believe that you might come to-night after all; but something made me long to go down to the sea. Did you see me only now, dear heart?"

"No, Lora."

For a moment she was still, while she gazed fixedly at Alastair.

"Ah," she whispered at last, "then you have been here all this night, and I not knowing it! Ah, Alùinn, it was *your* heart crying to mine that made me rise and leave the cot-

tage and come out into the dark. But why did you not come to me? When did you come to Innisròn? How did you come?"

"Dear, I could not wait for the *Clansman*. I left Greenock three hours earlier by the *Foam,* James Gilchrist's tug; for he undertook to put me ashore at the haven below Craig-Sionnach. Thence I walked to Dunmore. But I was not well, Lora; and I was so long on the way that I missed the *Clansman* as well as the Dunmore herring-steamer. Before nightfall, however, I persuaded Archibald Macleod, of Tighnacraigh, to bring me here on his smack. I landed at the Rock of the Seafold. It was already dusk, and my heart was against yours in longing, my beautiful gloom: yet over me came such a sorrow that I could not bear the homing, and so moved restlessly from shadow to shadow. I felt as though it would be better for me to deal with my sorrow alone and in the night, and that it was more bearable since I was so near you, and that any moment I could go to you."

"Why, why did you not come, Alastair? Oh, I longed, longed for you so!"

"Once I came close to the cottage, almost happy since I knew that you were so near to me. The red glow that warmed the dark

without comforted me. I thought I would look in upon you for a moment; and if you and Mary were awake and talking, that I should let you know I had come. But I saw that you lay in sleep; and I had scarce time to withdraw ere, as I feared, Mary saw me—though see me, indeed, perhaps she did, for in a brief while she opened the door and came out, and would have discovered me but that I moved swiftly to the shadow of the birk-shaws. Then, after a little, I wandered down by the shore. There was a voice in the sea—calling, calling. It was so cool and sweet: soft was the balm of the air of it, as the look of your eyes, Lora, as the touch of your hand. I was almost healed of my suffering, when suddenly the pain in my head sprang upon me, and I crouched in the hollow yonder, chill with the sweat of my agony."

"O Alastair, Alastair, then you are no better: that great doctor you went so far to see has done you no good?"

"And in the midst of my pain, Lora my Rest, I saw you standing by the sea upon the ferry-ledge. At first I took you for a vision, and my heart sank. But when the moonlight reached the isle and enfolded you, I saw that it was you indeed. And once more my pain and my sorrow overcame me!"

"Alastair, I am terrified! It was not thus for you before you went away. Great as was your pain, you had not this gloom of sorrow. Oh, what is it, what is it, dear heart? Tell me, tell me!"

Slowly Alastair held Lora back from him, and looked long and searchingly into her eyes.

She shrank, in an apprehension that, like a bird, flew bewildered from the blinding light that flashed out of the darkness—a vain bewilderment of foredoom.

Then, with a great effort, she bade him tell her what he had to say.

Too well he knew there was no time to lose: that any day, any moment, his dark hour would come upon him, and that then it would be too late. Yet he would fain have waited.

"Lora, have you heard aught said by any one concerning my illness?"

"Dear, Father Manus told me, on the day you went away, that you feared the trouble which came upon your father, and upon your father's father; and oh, Alastair my beloved, he told me what that trouble was."

"Then you know: you can understand?"

"What?"

"That which now appals me . . . now kills me."

"Alastair!"

"Yes, Lora?"

"Oh, Alastair, Alastair, you do not mean that . . . that . . . you too . . . *you* are . . . are . . . that *you* have the . . . the . . . mind-dark?"

"Dear heart of mine, this sorrow has come to us. I——"

With a sharp cry Lora held him to her, despairingly, wildly, as though even at that moment he were to be snatched from her. Then, in a passion of sobbing, she shook in his arms as a withered aspen-leaf ere it fall to the wind.

The tears ran down his face; his mouth twitched; his long, thin fingers moved restlessly in her hair and upon her quivering shoulder.

No other sound than her convulsive sobs, than his spasmodic breathing, met in the quietude of whisper-music exhaled as an odour by the sea and by the low wind among the corries and upon the grasses of the isle.

A white moth came fluttering slowly toward them, hovering vaguely awhile overhead, and then drifting alow and almost to their feet. In the shadow it loomed grey and formless—an obscure thing that might have come out of the heart of the unguarded brain. Upward again it fluttered, idly this way and that: then

suddenly alit upon the hair of Alastair, poising itself on spread wings, and now all agleam as with pale phosphorescent fire, where the moonlight filled it with sheen as of white water falling against the sun.

The gleam caught Lora's eyes as, with a weary sigh, she lifted her head.

A strange smile came into her face. Slowly she disengaged her right arm, and half raised it. Alastair was about to speak, but her eyes brought silence upon him.

"*Hush!*" she whispered at last.

He saw that her eyes looked beyond his, beyond him, as it seemed. What did she see? The trouble in his brain moved anew at this touch of mystery.

"What is it, Lora?"

"Hush, hush! . . . I see a sign from heaven upon your forehead . . . the sign of the white peace that Seumas says is upon them who are of the company of the Belovëd."

"Lora, what are you saying? What is it? What do you see?"

His voice suddenly was harsh, fretful. Lora shrank for a moment; then, as the white moth rose and fluttered away into the dark, faintly agleam with moonfire till it reached the shadow, she pitifully raised her hand to his brow.

"Come, dear, let us go in. All will be well with us, whatever happens."

"Never . . . never . . . never!"

"O Alastair, if it be God's will?"

"Ay, and if it be God's will?"

"I cannot lose you; you will always be mine; no sorrow can part us; nothing can separate us; nothing but the Passing, and that . . ."

"Lora!"

For answer she looked into his eyes.

"Lora, it is of that, of the Passing: . . . are you . . . are you brave enough not only to endure . . . but to . . . if we thought it well . . . if I asked you . . . ?"

A deep silence fell upon both. Hardly did either breathe. By some strange vagary of the strained mind, Lora thought the throb of her heart against her side was like the pulse of the engines of the *Clansman* to which she had listened with such intent expectation that very evening.

From the darkness to the north came the low monotone of the sea, as a muffled voice prophesying through the gates of Sleep and Death. Far to the east the tide-race tore through the Sound with a confused muttering of haste and tumult. Upon the isle the wind moved as a thing in pain, or idly weary: lifting

now from cranny to corrie, and through glen and hollow, and among the birk-shaws and the rowans, with long sighs and whispers where by Uisghe-dhu the valley of moonflowers sloped to the sea on the west, or among the reeds, and the gale, and the salt grasses around the clachan that lay duskily still on the little brae above the haven.

"Lora . . . would you . . . would . . . ?"

Only her caught breath at intervals gave answer. The short lisp and gurgle of the water in the sea-weed close by came nearer. The tide was on the flood, and the sand about their feet was already damp.

The immense semicircle of the sky domed sea and land with infinity. In the vast space the stars and planets fulfilled their ordered plan. Star by star, planet by planet, sun by sun, universe by universe moved jocund in the march of eternal death.

Beyond the two lonely figures, seaward, the moon swung, green-gold at the heart with circumambient flame of pearl.

Beautiful the suspended lamp of her glory —a censer swung before the Earth-Altar of the Unknown.

In their human pain the two drew closer still. The remote alien silences of the larger life around vaguely appalled them. Yet Lora

knew what was in his thought; what he foreshadowed; what he wished.

"It shall be as you will, Alastair, heart of me, life of me," she whispered. Then, with clasping arms, and dear entreaty, she urged him homeward.

"Come, come home, Alastair, *Alùinn.* Enough of sorrow to-night. Speak to me to-morrow of all that is in your mind; but to-night . . . to-night, no more! My heart will break. Come, dearest. Come, *mo mùirnean!* Hark! the wind is crying in the corrie: it is rising again on the other side of the isle: and we are already chill—oh, cold, so cold!"

Hand in hand, they moved slowly upward along the little pathway of mingled grass and shingle which led to the clachan from the ferry: he with bowed head, she with upward face.

A dog barked from a byre, another answered from a sheiling beyond. Suddenly there was a rushing sound, and Ghaoth, Alastair's dog, came leaping upon his master, whining and barking with joy. He stooped and fondled it; but in vain tried to quell its ecstasy in seeing him again.

Whether aroused by the barking of Ghaoth, or having awoke and found Lora absent from

the cottage, Mrs. Maclean had risen, lit a candle, and now stood upon the threshold, looking intently at the twain as they approached.

Among the islefolk many words are not used. The over-arching majesty of the sky, the surrounding majesty of the sea, the loneliness of these little wind-swept spots of earth isled in remote waters, leave a hush upon the brain, and foster eloquent silences rather than idle words.

Mrs. Maclean knew intuitively that something of disaster was in this nocturnal return of Alastair: that he and Lora had met by chance, or through a summons unknown to her: and that now they came—to her, in their youth, so tragically piteous under the shadow of calamity—craving only for that impossible boon of the young in sorrow: peace.

When they drew near to her, she turned and placed the candle on the table. Then, facing them, she came forward, led them in by the hand, and closed the door. She saw that Alastair was hatless, and his clothes damp and travel-stained; so with quiet, home-sweet words, she persuaded him to change his things while she laid some food for him to break his long fast with.

But though wearily he did the one, he would

have nothing of the other save a draught of warm milk.

A heavy drowsiness was now upon him. He could scarce uplift the lids from his eyes. His voice, when he spoke at all, was so low that it was barely audible.

After a silence, during which he had looked long at the fire, and closed his eyes at the last, with Lora's gaze hungrily set upon him, and the dark, sweet gloom of Mrs. Maclean's, wet with the dew of unshed tears, upon both of the twain whom she loved so passing well, he murmured huskily and confusedly:

"By green pastures . . . I will lay me down to sleep. . . . It calleth, calleth . . ."

Suddenly Mrs. Maclean arose. Taking Lora's hand, she led her to the fireside and motioned her to kneel beside Alastair. Then, blowing out the candle-flame, she too knelt. Only the fireglow now lit the room, filled with brooding shadows in the corners and with warm dusk where the two women kneeled and the man slept.

With arms lifted as if in invocation, the elder woman—her face wan under her grey hair, though touched with an unreal glow from the flaming peats—in a low, crooning voice, repeated the ancient rest-words, the ancient prayer of her people, said at the

covering up of the fire against the hours of sleep:

"Smàlaidh mis'n nochd an teine;
Mar a smàlas Mac Moire.
Gu'm bu slan an tigh's an teine,
Gu'm bu slan a' chiudeachd uile.
Co bhios air an lar?
Peadair agus Pòl,
Co bhios air an phaire nochd?
Moire mhin-gheal's a Mac.
Bial De a labhras,
Aingeal geal a dh' innseas—
Ga'r comhnadh's ga'r gleidheadh
Gus an tig an solus geal a maireach."

I will cover up the fire aright,
Even as directed by the Virgin's Son.
Safe be the house, and safe the fire,
And safe from harm be all the indwellers.
Who is that that I see on the floor?
Even Peter himself and Paul.
Upon whom shall this night's vigil rest?
Upon the blameless Virgin and her Son:
God's mouth has spoken it.
A white-robed angel shall be with us in the dark,
Till the coming of the sun at morn.

When she ceased, there was no sound save the low sobbing of Lora and the quiet breathing of the sleeper in the high-backed chair.

Having made the sign of the cross upon her breast and over the fire, she covered up the flame with ash and charred peat. Quietly,

then, she placed her strong arm around Alastair, and half guided, half lifted him to the bed in the adjoining room where he and Lora were wont to sleep. The girl-wife followed, and, with deft hands, unclad Alastair and laid him gently in the bed. Swiftly disrobing herself, she lay down by his side, her dark hair mingling on the pillow with his tangle of dull gold.

The gleam still emitted between the bars from beneath the covered peats passed into the room through the open doorway and fell upon the bed.

Alastair stirred; opened his eyes; looked with wild, startled gaze at Lora, then at Mrs. Maclean, who had again knelt, and with raised arms had begun her "Blessing of Peace."

With a sigh he closed his eyes, and the terror passed from his face. Once or twice he muttered parts of the lines of that ancient sleep-prayer, familiar to him since his boyhood, and before it was ended deep slumber had come upon him:

"*Laidhidh misc 'nochd*
Le Moire 's le 'Mac,
Le mathair mo Righ,
'Ni mo dhion 'o dhroch-bheairt,
Cha laidh mise leis an olc,
'S cha laidh an t' olc leam;
Ach laidhidh mì le Dia,

'S laidhidh Dia Ma' rium.
Lamh dheas Dhe fo'm cheann,
Crois nan naoi aingeal leam.
'O mhullach mo chinn
Gu craican mo bhonn.
Guidheam Peadair, guidheam Pòl,
Guidheam Moir-Oigh' 'sa Mac.
Guidheam an da ostal deug,
Gun mise 'dhol eug le'n cead.
'Dhia 'sa Mhoire na gloire.
'S a Mhic na oighe cubhraidh
Cumabh mise o na piantan dorcha,
'S Micheal geal' an cò 'ail m'anama."

This night I will lay me down to sleep
With Mary Virgin and her Son,
Even with the mother of my King,
Who protects me from all evil;
Nor shall evil lie down to sleep with me,
But I shall sleep with God:
And with me shall God lie down.
His right arm shall be under my head:
The cross of the Nine Angels be about me,
From the top of my head
To the soles of my feet.
I supplicate Peter, I supplicate Paul,
I supplicate Mary the Virgin and her Son,
I supplicate the twelve Apostles,
That evil befall us not this night.
Mary, in thy goodness and glory,
And Thou, Son of the sweet-savoured Virgin,
Protect us this night from all the pains of darkness.
And thou, Michael, guardian of souls, abide with us, watching.

When she looked down, at the end of her prayer, Mary saw that Lora's eyes also were closed; though by the muttering of the lips she knew her dear one was not asleep.

Softly she closed the door behind her; then, passing by the fire, went into the third room of the cottage.

Soon she too was in bed, softly repeating, as the weariness of sleep came over her:

Cha laidh mise leis an olc,
'S cha laidh an t' olc leam.

Without, came the rising sound of the tide among the pebbles on the shore, the incessant chime of wave lapsing over wave on flat rocks. The sough of the wind fell from the corries of Craig-an-Iolair, and died in whispers among the fern and dew-cold grasses.

So went the hours from silence into silence. And in time came the dawn, and an ashen-grey upon the sea, and a grey gloom upon each leaf and every dusky frond and blade. But when the black of the mainland became gold, and a trouble of light moved, swiftly-throbbing, across the eastern water, Michael the Watcher withdrew.

At the window of the room where Alastair and Lora slept, the beautiful sunflood of the new day poured in rejoicingly.

One long streamer of light fell upon his yellow hair and kissed the eyelids of a veiled, subsiding mind. Downward it moved, and filled with its gleam the dark-brown hair which lay across the white breast of Lora. Then, surely, it passed beneath the flower of her bosom and into her heart, and warmed it with joy; for with a smile she awoke, murmuring, "*Pharais, Pharais.*"

III

Before the want of that day, the rumour went among the scant population of Innisròn that Alastair, son of Diarmid of Macleod, was mad: that, in the phrasing of the islesman, he had the mind-dark.

Men and women whispered the thing with awe. In the West, something almost of a hieratic significance is involved in the poetic phrase that God has filled with dusk the house of the brain. Not thus is spoken of the violence of insanity—the mere insurgence of delirium from the fever of hate, or from jealousy, or love, or evil of the blood, or the curse of drink. But that veil of darkness which comes down upon the mind of man or woman in the fullness of life, and puts an im-

permeable mist or a twilight of awful gloom about the soul, is looked upon not only with an exceeding tenderness, but with awe, and as of a bowing of the head before a divine mystery.

Yet the rumour was not true, for Alastair Macleod, though he stood within the shadow, had not yet sunk into the darkness.

As it had chanced, Mrs. Maclean was not the only person who had seen him and Lora on their return.

Late in the night Ian Maclean had come back from the western side of the isle, and was standing in the shadow of the byre when, hand in hand, Lora and Alastair approached.

The old man had been unhappy, and, after leaving his kinsman at Ardfeulan, had wandered up among the corries. In the wail of the wind along the heights, in the sough of it in the little glens and shelving uplands, he heard voices to which he would fain not have listened, for they spoke of a terror that was in the air.

The moment he saw Alastair's eyes, dark within the moonlit pallor of the face, he knew that his premonitions were no mere imaginings. On his forehead he saw the shadow of doom.

With a sigh he turned, and, having entered

the byre and gone to the part of it shut off for his use, lay down upon his bed of fragrant fern. But, weary as he was, he could not sleep.

Again the vision came to him: and once more he saw Alastair move blindly in an unfamiliar place, with the mist no longer up to his waist only, but risen now to his throat, and with thin tongues reaching upward still.

The long night went drearily past. When the day was come, Ian rose and let out the kye. The sweet freshness of the air was as balm to his weariness. The wind blew cool upon his brows, and a breath of the sea mingled with the myriad suspiration of the earth and gave him the intoxication of the dawn. His eyes grew brighter, his step firmer, his mien no longer that of profound dejection; and when Ghaoth came leaping toward him, and barked about the half-amused, half-angry cows—who stopped to plash their hoofs in the thick white dew, against which the warm breaths fell revolvingly like grey whorls of steam, and to swing their great horns against their flanks, wild and shaggy as the brown hill-sides in autumn—then all the gloom of the night went from him.

"Mayhap it was but a dream," he muttered: "and who can tell the folly of the mind?"

Then, with Ghaoth's help, he got the steers from the neighbouring shed and "Righ-geal," the great tawny-shaggy bull, whose either horn could have pierced right through and beyond the biggest drover who ever crossed the Kyles at Colintraive, and urged all the kine upward to the higher pastures, where the thyme was so sweet, close-clustered as it was among the soft green hair of the isle-grass.

It seemed to him as though all the larks on Innisròn were singing at one time and just there, everywhere around and above him. In the birk-shaws, there was a mavis that was as a fount wherefrom music spilled intoxicatingly: by the burn, the merles called, recalled, and called yet again, and over and over, sweet and blithe, and with loud, reckless cries of mirth and joy. On every gorse-bush, yellow with bloom, fragrant almost to pain, and filled with the murmur of the wild-bee and the high, thin hum of the wood-wasp, a yellow-hammer flitted to and fro, or sang its *tweet—tweet—tweet—o-o-oh sweet!—sweet!*

The sky was almost cloudless save for an angry flush in the north-east—a deep, living blue of infinite, though indiscernibly faint gradation. Here and there, too, were thin, almost invisible grey mare's-tails swept upward, as though they were snow-dust or sea-

spray, before the flying feet of the Weaver of the Winds.

As soon as Ian had reached the last dyke, and had seen "Righ-geal" lead his impatient following toward the uplands, he stood swaying his grey head slowly to and fro, with his right hand moving automatically in rhythmic accord, while he repeated the familiar "Rann Buacbailleac," or Rune on the driving of the cattle to the pasture:

I

"Siubhal beinne, siubhal baile,
Siubhal gu re fada farsuinn;
Buachaille Mhic De m'ar casaibh,
Gu mu slan a thig sibh dachaidh,
Buachaille Mhic De m'ar casaibh
Gu mu slan a thig sibh dachaidh.

II

"Comraig, Dhia agus Chalum-Chille,
Bhith m'ar timchioll a fabh's a tilleadh,
Agus nan or-chiabh down!
Agus Banachaig nan basa min-gheal,
Bride nan or-chiabh down!"

I

Travel ye moorland, travel ye townland,
Travel ye gently far and wide,
God's Son be the Herdsman about your feet,
Whole may ye home return.
God's Son be the Herdsman about your feet,
Whole may ye home return.

II

The protection of God and of Columba,
Encompass your going and coming;
And about you be the milkmaid of the smooth white palms,
Bridget of the clustering hair, golden brown,
And about you be the milkmaid of the smooth white palms,
Bridget of the clustering hair, golden brown!

Turning aside, the shepherd searched here and there among the boulders and split rocks which everywhere obtruded from the sea of heather. For a time his quest was unrewarded; but just as he was about to relinquish it he gave an abrupt exclamation. He had seen the *Torranan*, that rare plant, of which he had often heard, but had never found: and, for sure, he would never have sought it there, for it was said to be a plant of the sea's lip—that is to say, of the shore, within reach of the tide-breath.

Muttering over and over, "*Buainams' thu thorranain!*"—Let me pluck thee, Torranan,—he gained the precious bloom at last, and then, holding it before him, half spoke, half chanted this ancient incantation, known in the isles as the "Eolas an Torranain," a spell of good service to keep the cows from the harm of the evil eye, and also to increase their milk:

"Buainams' thu thoranain
Le'd uile bheannachd's le'd uile bhuaidh—"

Let me pluck thee, Torranan!
With all thy blessedness and all thy virtue,
The nine blessings came with the nine parts,
By the virtue of the Torranan.
The hand of St. Bride with me.
I am now to pluck thee.

Let me pluck thee, Torranan!
With thine increase as to sea and land;
With the flowing tide that shall know no ebbing
By the assistance of the chaste St. Bride,
The holy St. Columba directing me,
Gentle Oran protecting me,
And St. Michael, of high-crested steeds,
Imparting virtue to the matter the while,
Darling plant of all virtue,
I am now plucking thee!

All the time the old man had been carefully disengaging the cream-white, dome-shaped flower, he had crooned over and over:

"Lamh Bhride leam,
Tha mi 'nis ga'd bhuain!"

The hand of St. Bride with me
I am now to pluck thee!

So, too, now—now that he had the Torranan safe at last, he kept repeating:

" 'Cuir buaidh anns an ni,
Tha mo lus lurach a nis air a bhuain!"

Darling plant of all virtue,
I am now plucking thee!

But the line that was on his lips for long that day—even after he had given the flower to Mary Maclean, with assurance that it was gathered during the lift of the tide, was *Ri lionadh gun tra'adh*—" With the flowing tide that shall know no ebbing." Over and over he said this below his breath. *Ri lionadh gun tra'adh;* strange words these: what was the hidden thing in them? What was the *lionadh,* the flowing tide: was it life or death?

But now the rare bloom was found: he was glad of that. He doffed his weather-worn bonnet, and placed the flower in the hollow of it: then, calling Ghaoth from the already scattered kye, he turned and made his way back to the clachan.

When he entered Mrs. Maclean's cottage, where his breakfast of porridge was ready, he made and received the usual salutation of blessing: and then sat down in silence.

The room was full of sunlight—so full that Mrs. Maclean had hung a screen of bracken from an iron hook, so that it shielded the

peat-fire and let the life of the flame burn unchecked.

He did not look at Alastair; and, indeed, all the morning-blitheness had gone out of the eyes of the old man. Not that any there noticed his taciturnity. Mrs. Maclean moved softly to and fro. Alastair sat broodingly in the leathern chair before the fire: Lora on a stool at his feet, with her right hand clasped in his left and her eyes fixed on his face. On the table the porridge was untouched, the new bread uncut, the warm milk grown tepid.

With a sigh, Alastair rose at last. Crossing the room, he went to the east window and stared forth unseeingly, or, at any rate, without sign of any kind. Then, restlessly, he began to pace to and fro. Repressing her tears, Lora seated herself at the table and tried to eat, hopeful that she might thus induce him to do likewise. Mrs. Maclean followed her example, but ate in silence. She had almost ended, when Lora saw that she had abruptly laid down her spoon and was looking intently at Ian.

The old man now followed every motion of the invalid with a look as of one fascinated. When, suddenly, Alastair turned, went to the door and crossed the threshold, Ian rose and followed.

A few seconds later he came back, his withered face almost as white as his hair.

Mrs. Maclean met him ere he could speak.

"Not a word before *her*," she whispered. "Meet me at the byre: I shall be there in a minute or two."

But just then Lora rose and went out.

"Ian Maclean, what is it?"

"Mary, my kinswoman, he is not alone."

"Not alone?"

"I have seen *the other*."

She knew now what he meant. He had seen the shadow-self, the phantasm of the living that, ere death, is often seen alongside the one who shall soon die. Mrs. Maclean knew well that this shadowy second-self simulated the real self, and that even all the actions of the body were reproduced with a grotesque verisimilitude. But she was also aware how, sometimes, one may learn from the mien of the phantasm what is hidden in the aspect of the doomed.

"Last night," Ian went on in a dull voice, "I had the sight again. I saw the mist of death as high about him as when a man is sunken in a peat-bog up to the eyes."

"Well? I know you have more to say."

"Ay."

"Speak, Ian!"

With a long, indrawn breath, the old man resumed in a slow, reluctant voice.

"When I came in, a little ago, I saw the sorrow there was on every face. My vision, too, came back upon me, and I had trouble. I meant to eat and go out quickly. But when Mr. Alastair began to move about, I saw that he was not alone. I knew *the other* at once. There could be no mistake. In dress, in height, in face, in movement, they were the same. But there was a difference."

Mrs. Maclean shuddered slightly, and her lips opened as though she were about to speak. With a gesture, however, she signed to Ian to continue.

"Ay, there was a difference. I hoped against my eyes; but when I followed him yonder I saw what I saw, and what killed my hope."

"Speak, speak, Ian!"

"In all things, the same but one, and that was in the eyes, in the expression. Those of Mr. Alastair were dull and lightless, and brooding low; those of *the other* were large and wild, and stared in terror and amaze; and on the face of the thing the Fear lay, and moved, and was alive."

"O Ian, Ian, what does it mean?"

"It means this, Mary, daughter of Don-

nacha, what, sure, you know well: that not only is the shadow of death near this house, but that upon Alastair Mac Diarmid is the mind-dark that lay upon his father and upon his father's father."

"The curse of Michael be upon this evil, Ian!"

"Even so, *Mhoire nighean Donnacha.*"

"His father was the third of his race in succession, who, soon or late, fell under that shadow. And we all know, sure we all know, that after the third generation the veil is withdrawn. This thing is an evil dream of yours, Ian Maclean!"

"It is an evil doing of *some one*," muttered the old man, with sombre eyes.

"Perhaps"—

But before Mrs. Maclean could say what was in her mind, Alastair and Lora entered.

With downcast eyes Ian passed out, giving a furtive, terrified look behind him ere he closed the door.

It was through the old islesman that the rumour of Alastair Macleod's madness went abroad.

Long before the stormy afternoon which followed the beautiful youth of that day, with its ominous morning-red in the north-east, had

waned to gloaming, there was not a soul on Innisròn who did not know of the sorrow.

Yet no one came near out of a cruel sympathy: no one spoke heedless words either of question or solace to Mrs. Maclean; for none could be said to the two most concerned, neither Alastair nor Lora having been seen throughout the day.

Nevertheless, a deep resentment prevailed against one person upon the island. Not only had the spring gone ill with the fishing, but the nets had been torn and trailed in a way that suggested something beyond the blind malice of wind and wave and the currents of the deep sea and the savage dog-fish. Several cows had ceased to give milk; hens had ceased to lay; and Gregor McGregor's white mare had dropped a dead foal, the first time such a thing had happened on the isle. And now that, unforeseen and in the heyday of youth and health, the worst of all troubles had come upon Alastair Macleod, many recalled how his father, Macleod of Dunvrechan, who had died on Innisròn, had not only once denounced old Ealasaid MacAodh as a woman of the evil eye, but had cursed her ere he died, and attributed his misery to a blight of her working.

As one spake to another, the same thought

came into each mind: that the old widow who lived at Craig-Ruaidh, at the head of the Glen of the Dark Water, had put her malice upon Alastair Mac Diarmid.

Some one, in a group by the ferry, reminded her hearers that, by a mischance, every one on the isle save Widow MacAodh had been invited to the feast in the little mission-house, when "*Lora nighean maighstir Tormaid*" was wedded; and how it was well known that old Ealasaid had been full of anger and pain at the slight, and had since scarce spoken with any one save Mrs. Maclean, with whom no bitterness was ever long to endure.

"Ay, ay, it's her doing—it's her doing," was muttered all round; "she has put the spell of the evil eye upon him—foreigner that she is."

Many years had gone by since Duncan bàn MacAodh, a Hebridean, who had settled in Innisròn, brought thither a wife out of remote St. Kilda. Long since he had gone to his rest, and lay among the few dead under the great runic cross at the extreme of Ardfeulan, on the west of the isle; yet he was still "the man from Uist," as his widow was still the "outlander."

"Ian," said Pòl Macdonald, one of the oldest of the fishermen, "you too are said to

have *the thing* in you, though you always look through both eyes, and with good will to man and beast. Let you, and two others of us, go to-night to Widow Ealasaid's, do upon her and find out if she is accursed: . . . and then . . . and then . . ."

No one spoke, though a veiled consenting glance went between Macdonald and Ian and a young islesman, Ronald Macrae, who lived over by Ardfeulan.

It was not a subject to discuss further in that hour of uncertainty. One or two members of the group had already edged away, when Kathia Macdonald suddenly drew attention to the appearance of the first three of the returning herring-boats, anxiously expected for over an hour past.

The brown-sailed wherries came in under the lee of the isle in a smother of foam. Already a snarling north-easter was racing over the sea, still smelling of the ling and bracken it had flattened as it tore over the summits of the mainland hills.

The water was of a shifting emerald near the haven; of a dark bottle-green beyond; and, out in the open, black, fretted and torn with staring white splashes and a myriad-leaping surge.

The race of the sea-horses had begun, and

no one on Innisròn was at ease till the last boat had come safely round from Ardgheal, the point whence on the yestereve Lora had so eagerly watched for the coming of her husband.

A fiery sunset disclosed the immense and swirling procession of clouds high over the isle—cloud not only racing after cloud, but often leaping one upon the other as flying sheep in panic. Toward the east, the vapours were larger and darker: the cohorts more densely massed. Above the mainland stretched one vast unbroken phalanx of purple-livid gloom, out of the incessant and spasmodically convulsive travail in whose depths swept monstrous cloudbirths.

As the night fell, there was audible beyond the hills the noise of a baffled thunderstorm—a tempest which had been caught among the mountains, and could no more lift itself over the summits than a screaming and wrestling eagle could tear itself from a stag in whose hide its talons had become irremovably gripped.

Above the peaks and along the flank of the mass of livid gloom, spears of lightning were swung against the wind; and with splinter and flash, there was a rain of whirled lances as against some unseen assault from below.

The tumult soared, hurled downward, and fell upon Innisròn. The isle-folk listened in the dark with awe. Roar and crash, and a frightful, terrifying howling followed every blast, as of a volcano belching forth avalanche after avalanche, and shaking to the valleys the *débris* of all the hills. Roar upon roar, crash upon crash, howl upon howl: with the strident raucous scream of the wind, yelling a pæan of triumph as it leaped before the javelins of the lightning and tore in its ruinous might far out across the heaving, swaying, moaning sea.

It was a night for all who fare by or upon the deep waters to remember with awe: for those whose lives, and kin, and gear had gone scatheless, to recollect with thanksgiving: for those whose weal went with it, to recall with bowed heads or wet eyes.

An hour or more after nightfall, three figures moved with the wind across the isle: blurred shadows astir in the tempest-riven dark. Ronald Macrae carried a lantern; but speedily laid it down by a cairn, for the flame could not live.

He and Ian and Pòl were grimly silent, not only on the path through the wind-swept heather, but when under shelter from a bight of hillside or overhanging crag. The business

that took them out in that tempest lay heavy upon them.

If, out of her own mouth, or by sign or deed of her own, Ealasaid should convict herself of the use of the evil eye, her doom would be fixed. Even in the bitterness of superstition, however, the islesmen were not bent upon the extreme penalty, the meed of those who deal in witchcraft. The dwellers on Innisròn, as all who live among the outer isles in general, are too near the loneliness of life and death to be wanton in the taking away of that which is so great in the eyes of man and so small in the eyes of God.

The worst they intended was to make Ealasaid bring her own doom upon her: then, on the morrow, her sheiling would be burned to the ground and the ashes scattered to the four quarters, while she herself would be exiled from the island under ban of cross, mystic word, and the ancient Celtic anathema.

So wild was the wind and dark the way, that a full hour passed before they reached the Glen of the Dark Water, and heard the savage ramping and charging of the endless squadrons of the waves against the promontory of Ardfeulan.

As they drew near the little cottage, a lonely dwelling on the brae which sloped to the glen,

they saw that the occupant had not yet gone to bed, for a red gleam of light stole comfortingly across the forlorn dark.

With a significant touch on the shoulder of each of his companions, Ian led them to within a yard or two of the window.

"Hush," he whispered, in a momentary lull; "make no noise as we look in. She might hear, and blast us with her evil eye. Perhaps she is even now talking with some warlock or fiend."

Trembling, the three men huddled under the wall. At last, slowly, and with hearts wildly a-throb, they raised themselves and looked within.

The room was bare in its clean poverty. On the rickety wooden table was a bowl with a little unfinished porridge in it. A yard away was an open Gaelic Bible, with a pair of horn spectacles laid across the open page. At a spinning stool between the table and the peat-fire was an old woman, kneeling, with her hands clasped and her face upraised. On the poor, tired, worn features was a look of pathetic yearning, straining from a white and beautiful peace.

So rapt was she that she did not see a hand move the outer latch of the window, or feel the sudden breath of the night-air.

Then those without, waiting to hearken to sorcery more appalling than the savagery of the tempest, heard old Ealasaid repeat this prayer:

"*Tha 'n la nis air falbh ùainn,*
Tha 'n oidhche 'tighinn orm dlùth;
'S ni mise luidhe gu dion
Fo dhubhar sgiath mo rùin.
O gach cunnart 's o gach bàs,
'S o gach nàmhaid th' aig Mac Dhe,
O nàdur dhaoine borba,
'S o choirbteachd mo nàduir fèin,
Gabhaidh mis' a nis armachd Dhe,
Gun bhi reubta no brisd',
'Sge b' oil leis an t' sàtan 's le phàirt
Bi'dh mis' air mo gheàrd a nis."

The day is now gone;
Dark night gathers around,
And I will lay me safely down (to sleep)
Under the shadow of my Beloved One's wing.
Against all dangers, and death in every form,
Against each enemy of God's good Son,
Against the anger of the turbulent people,
And against the corruption of my own nature,
I will take unto me the armour of God—
That shall protect me from all assaults:
And in spite of Satan and all his following,
I shall be well and surely guarded.

When, after an interval of speechless prayer, the lonely old woman rose painfully to her feet,

she noticed the open window, and heard the sough of the wind without.

With a tired sigh, she crossed the room to close the inside latch. But, at the window, she stood irresolute, held by the noise of the sea beating against the clamour of the wind. She stooped, and peered forth.

Not a thing was visible. Suddenly a broad wavering gleam of sheet-lightning lit up the whole brae. Almost, she fancied, she could have sworn she saw three human figures, with bowed heads, moving across the brow of the slope.

She could not know that three men, stricken with shame and remorse—remorse which would ere long bloom into the white flower of repentance, to be worn lovingly by all on the isle—were stealing homeward from a vain and wicked errand.

With a shudder, she crossed herself, fearing that the figures she had imagined, or had really seen, were the three dreadful Accursed who drove the spear into Christ's side and the nails into His hands and feet, and with mocking offered Him the bitter sponge.

Slowly repeating:

> *"O gach cunnart 's o gach bàs,*
> *'S o gach nàmhaid th' aig Mac Dhe,"*

she quenched with charred peat the flame of her fire, and was soon in a child-like rest "under the shadow of the wing of her Beloved One."

When midnight came upon the isle, the worst violence of the storm was over. Nevertheless, upon the sea was the awfulness of desolation, the rumour of a terrible wrath.

All slept at last: the innocent Ealasaid, the foolish seekers of evil, the isle-folk one and all —except two.

Alastair and Lora lay in each others' arms as children terrified in the dark.

That afternoon his madness had come upon him for a while; and he had smiled grimly at he knew not what, and laughed while the tears streamed from the eyes of Lora and Mary; and moaned betimes; and cried out against the calling of the sea; and closed his ears against the frightful wailing of a kelpie in the tarn beyond the byre; and, at the last, shook as in an ague before the fire, fearful of some informulate terror, but with such a crown of sorrow on his forehead that the two women bowed their faces in their hands, speechless with grief: with such a horror in his eyes that Ghaoth shrank from him with bristling fell and upcurled, snarling lip.

But with the night came yet another merciful lifting of the veil.

While the storm raged at its worst, the three kneeled, and Mrs. Maclean read from the beautiful Gaelic Scripture. Then, with all the tenderness of her childless passion of maternity, she prayed for God's balm and peace and the healing of His hand.

When, in time, she went to her own room, Alastair and Lora talked for long in a low voice.

On the day he had first heard that the seed of life had taken root in her womb, and knew that a child was to be born of their great love, he had known a thrill of such rapture that he could scarce see Lora for the blinding of the tears of joy.

Beautiful she was to all: to him, lovely and tender as twilight and dear beyond words: but at that moment, when he learned from her own lips of her only half explicable trouble, he knew he had passed into a Holy of Holies of love and reverent passion such as he had but vaguely dreamed of as possible.

But now, on this wild night of storm without and more awful dread within, he recalled with horror what had been driven from his mind.

Bitter as was the doom he and Lora had to

face, tenfold bitter was it made by the thought that they were to bring into the world yet another soul shrouded in the shadow of his own intolerable ill.

And so it was that, at the last, Alastair and Lora Macleod, knowing his madness was at hand and could be cured of no man, and that their lives were spilled out as lees from a cup, and that they were witlessly dooming the unborn child to a heritage of grief, gave solemn troth to each other that on the morrow they would go forth hand in hand, and, together in death as in life, lay themselves beneath that ever-wandering yet ever-returning wave which beats day and night, and week by week, and year by year, and without end for ever, about the sea-gathered graveyard on the remote west of Innisròn.

Then was a great peace theirs. For the last time they laid themselves down on their bed: for the last time twined their arms around each other, while on the same pillow their heads lay side by side, the hair about his forehead wet with her falling tears: for the last time they kept vigil through the terror of the dark—an awful terror now, with the wrath of the sea without, with the shadow of Death within the room, with the blackness of oblivion creeping, creeping from chamber to chamber

in the darkened house of a dulled, subsiding brain.

Ere dawn, Alastair slept. Lora lay awake, trembling, longing for the day, yet praying God to withhold it; sick with baffled hope, with the ache of weariness, with the sound of the moan and hollow boom of the sea. More deep and terrible in her ears grew that midnight Voice, reverberant in the room as in the whorl of a shell: a dreadful iterance of menace, a dirge that confusedly she seemed to know well, a swelling chant, a requiem.

IV

An hour after sunrise there was not a cloud in the sky. The first day of June came clad in the fullness of summer. Sea and land seemed as though they had been immersed in that Fount of Life which wells from the hollow of the Hand which upholdeth Tir-na-h' Oighe, the isle of eternal youth.

The low island-trees had not suffered as had those on the mainland: yet everywhere were strewn branches, and, on the uplands, boughs wrenched away, and often hurled far from the parent tree.

But upon all the isle there was now a deep

quiescence. In the warm languor, even the birds sang less wildly clear, though the high, remote, falling lark-music floated spirally earthward, poignantly sweet. An indescribably delicate shimmer of haze lay on the heights and pastures, and where the corries sloped jaggedly seaward, each with a singing burn splashing or wimpling adown its heart. From the uplands came the lowing of the kine, the bleating of the ewes and lambs, the rapid whirring gurgle of the grouse among the heather. The wailing of curlews rose and fell; the sharp cries of the cliff-hawks beat against Craig-Ruaidh. High overhead, as motionlessly in motion as the snow-white disc of the moon lying immeasurably more remote within the vast blue hollow of the sky, an eagle poised on outspread wings, and then, without visible effort or movement, drifted slowly out of sight like a cloud blown by the wind.

Only upon the sea was something of the tumult of the past night still a reality.

Around the isle, and in the wide Sound between it and the mainland, the " white sheep " moved in endless procession, no longer wildly dispersed and huddled and torn by the wolves of the tempest. Oceanward the sea-horses swept onward magnificently, champing and whirling white foam about their green flanks,

and tossing on high their manes of sunlit rainbow gold, dazzling-white and multitudinous far as sight could reach.

Clamour of gulls, noise of waves, lisp and chime and flute-call of the shallows among the rock-holes and upon the whispering tongues of the sea-weed—what joy, and stir, and breath of life!

Hand in hand, in the hot noon, Lora and Alastair went idly along the sheep-path leading from the clachan to the promontory of Ardgheal. The smell of the brine from the sea and wrack-strewn shore, the sun-wrought fragrance of the grass and thyme, of bracken and gale, of birch and hawthorn and trailing briar, of the whole, beautiful, living, warm body of the earth so lay upon the tired senses with a healing as of balm, that even the tears in Lora's eyes ceased to gather, leaving there only a softness as of twilight-dew in violets.

It was to be their last walk in the sunshine of that day—their last participance in the sunshine of life.

All the morning had been spent by Alastair in writing and brooding. Once again he had talked over with Lora that projected deed, which to them seemed the one right and fitting end to the tragedy of circumstance. She had

promised that even if the darkness came down upon his mind irretrievably she would fulfill her troth with him. Great love casteth out fear; but even if this had not been so with her, she bore in mind the menace of what he had said about the child.

She, too, had spent a little of that last morning in writing, though her letter was not to go across the sea to the mainland, but to be left with old Ian to give to Mary on the morrow.

It was close upon noon when she saw that Alastair's gloom was upon him again, though he was now as quiet as a child. Taking his hand, she led him forth, heedful to avoid the clachan, and vaguely wishful to visit once more that little eastern haven of Ardgheal where, but two days ago, she had longingly awaited Alastair's return, and where, months before, he had first won her love.

He seemed to take pleasure in the sight of the sea he loved so well, and in the songs of the birds, and to be vaguely displeased because Ghaoth would not leap to his caress as usual, or else would crouch at his feet with startled eyes and low whine.

When Lora spoke, he answered seldom; but when he did, she knew that he understood. Once or twice he looked at her strangely; and

once, with a thrill of awe and dread, she saw that it was unrecognisingly.

She caught the fragment of an *Eolas,* a spell, as his lips moved; and the fear was upon her because of the mystery behind the words:

"'*S i'n t-suil a chi,*
'S e'en cridhe a smuainicheas,
'S i'n teanga 'labhras:
'S mise'n Triuir qu tilleadh so ortsa,
Lora-mo-bèan,
An ainm an Athar, a Mhic, 's an
Spioraidh Naoimh!"

'T is the eye that sees,
'T is the heart that thinks,
'T is the tongue that speaks:
I am the Three to turn this off to you,
Lora, my wife:
In the name of the Father, of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost.

With a sob, she turned and put her arms about him. Never had he seemed so fair in her sight—tall and comely as a young pine, of a beauty beyond that of any man she had ever seen. No wonder that her father, familiar lover of the Ossianic ballads, had been wont, remembering the beauty of the second son of Usnoth, lord of Etha, to call Alastair *Ailthos.*

" Dear, my dear one, Ailthos, Alastair! " she

cried, clinging close. "Look at me! Speak to me! Do you not know me?"

Slowly he turned his eyes upon her, and after a brief perplexity the shadow went out of them, and he smiled gently.

"Let us go home, my fawn," he whispered. "I am tired. It would be too sad to go down to Ardgheal."

He had already caught sight of the smoke of a steamer beyond Dunmore Point; and fearing that it might be the *Clansman*—for he thought the hour much later than it was—he hoped to spare Lora another needless pang. Moreover, his growing dread of seeing any one was stronger than ever upon him.

So they turned thus soon even in that last sunshine, and entering the cottage, sat before the smouldering peat-fire; he brooding darkly, Lora dreaming through her slow-welling tears, and both . . . waiting.

Though, at dusk, a heavy sea still ran, it was partly due to the surge of the ground-swell and to the turbulence of the tide, for there was but little wind even away from the shelter of the isle, and what there was came mostly in short, sudden puffs and wandering breaths.

In the quietude of the gloaming, it was as though the sea called all round Innisròn as a

beast of prey stalks about a high sheepfold, growling, breathing heavily, ravening.

After the supper, eaten frugally and in silence, Lora and Alastair listened once again to the peat-prayer and the Blessing of Peace of Mrs. Maclean; then, not daring to say any word to her but that of a husky farewell for the night, and fearful even of meeting the glance of her quiet eyes, they went to their room, there to sit silently awhile in the darkness, hand in hand.

No one saw them leave the cottage an hour later: not a soul heard them as they passed through the clachan.

The road they chose was that sheep-path through the heather which led to Ardfeulan by the Glen of the Dark Water. Each knew the way well, otherwise their faring westward would have been difficult, for the sky was veiled by a thin mist and the moon was not visible.

They walked in silence; sometimes Lora in advance, but, whenever practicable, together, and hand in hand.

At last they reached the Glen of the Dark Water, and perceived through the gloaming the sheiling of Ealasaid MacAodh. This they skirted, and then entered a sloping hollow, at the base of which was audible the hoarse

murmuring of the sea. Lora knew the place well. A week ago she had been there with Alastair, and remembered that the whole slope was a mass of moonflowers, tall, white, and so close-clustered that the green stems could hardly be seen.*

The wan glimmer of them was perceptible now, like the milky way on a night when a faint frost-mist prevails. Around, there was nothing else visible. Not a tree grew in that place: not a crag rose out of the sea of death-white blooms. The low-hanging mist-cloud veiled all things. It was as though the grave had been passed, and this was the gloom of the Death-sleep land that lies beyond. Only *there* is eternal silence: here, the dull menace of the sea made a ceaseless murmur about the obscure coasts.

As they entered the valley of moonflowers, dimly seeing their way a few yards beyond them, and hearkening to the inwash and resurgence of the tide moving along the extreme frontiers of the land, a sense of unspeakable dread came over Alastair and Lora.

They stood still, hardly daring to breathe. Both vaguely remembered something: they

* A tall, cream-white marguérite, native to the Outer Isles and the Hebrides, is known to the Islanders as the Moonflower.

knew not what, save that the tragic memory was linked with reminiscence of a valley of moonflowers seen in a dark twilight. Was it all a dream, coincident in their minds? Or had life once before, in some unremembered state, wrought tragic issues for them by a valley of white flowers seen in the darkness, with a deeper darkness around, a veiled sky above, and the hoarse, confused prophesying of the sea beyond?

As they stood, the moon—about an hour risen—glimmered through the veil of cloud. As with a hand, the rift was slowly made; but though the light was now clearly visible, it still gleamed through filmy shrouds of vapour. There was no shape, no central luminous spot even: only a diffused sheen which spread for a great span northward and southward, though it illumed nothing beneath save the long sloping hollow filled with moonflowers. The blooms rose almost to the knees of the two silent and trembling figures. For some inscrutable reason, the advance of light had not brought any comfort to either: rather, their vague terror increased almost unendurably.

The sea called below. Lora shuddered, and drew back a step or two.

A long, wavering, greenish light appeared high above the south-west. As the sheet-light-

ning fled shudderingly northward, it lapsed into ashen tremors before it was swallowed up of the darkness, as a wounded sea-bird in the deep.

In that brief gleam, Alastair turned and looked into Lora's eyes.

She moved to his side again, and once more took his hand. Then, slowly, and still without word one to the other, they moved downward through the hollow.

There was not a sound about them save the susurrus of their feet going through the moon-flowers. From the glen alone came any break in the inland stillness, the noise of water running swiftly from ledge to ledge. In the darkness where the sea was, there broke the fluctuating moan and boom of ocean. From far across the wave came a thin, forlorn sound that was the crying of the wind.

Minute by minute, as they waded through that death-white wilderness, the moon wove the cloud-shroud into thinner veils, till at last, as the two figures emerged upon the shore by the side of a precipitous scaur, they were of a filmy gossamer that no longer obscured the golden-yellow globe that wheeled solemnly through the appalling upper solitudes of the night.

The tide, at the last reach of the ebb for

nearly an hour past, was now on the flood: though the first indeterminate babble of returning waters was scarce different from the lapsing ebb-music in aught save a gurgling swiftly repetitive undertone.

The scaur by whose side they stood was hollow, and was known as the Cave of the Sea-Woman. It could be reached dry-shod, or nearly so, only at low-water, and even then only during calm, or when the wind did not blow from the south or west. For years beyond record it had been almost unvisited, for the cavern was a place of deadly peril except just before and after the extreme ebb. But after the death of two of his sons—one in the effort to swim outward against the inrush of the tide; the other by falling, or being swept backward to the deep chasm that lay at the far end of the cave—old Macrae, of Ardfeulan Farm near by, had caused rude steps to be cut in the funnel-like hollow rising sheer up from the sloping ledge that lipped the chasm and reached the summit of the scaur.

The smell of the brine from the dripping boulders smote shrewdly upon Alastair and Lora as they stood at the weedy mouth of the cavern. Then for the first time that night they turned their backs upon the sea, and moved slowly across the long, flat slabs of rock.

It was not dark at the entrance to the Cavern of the Sea-Woman, for the moonlight moved within it as the hand of a blind man groping blankly in an unfamiliar place. The arch of the rock was clear, and even the frondage of fern and sea-plants suspended from its lower curve; also, beneath, a mass of mossed crag, just beyond the highest reach of the tides. Among this dark crag-vegetation grew strange plants; but none stranger or so rare as the sea-grape, or mermaid's-fruit of the islanders. No one on Innisròn knew its proper designation, and it had become known at all as the sea-grape only because some student of rare things discovered and wrote about it under that name, as perhaps the culminating treasure-trove of the botanist in the Scottish West. It is a plant which clings as a tendril, choosing only the summit of high rocks or boulders in some sunless place where it can breathe the ooze from dead or dying sea-weed, and can feel the salt air reach it with a chilly touch. It lies low, with its thin, moist, ash-grey stems; its round, pale-green, transparent leaves faintly spotted with livid blotches; and its infrequent clusters of small, juicy berries of a hue of dusky yellow.

The isle-folk regard it with awe. Though the fruit is poisonous, and a deadly draught

can be distilled from the leaves, a few berries would not suffice to kill. To eat sparingly of the sea-grape is not to invite death necessarily, but to bring about a stupor so deep that for an hour or more no familiar sound can reach the ear, no ordinary shock vibrate along the nerves, no common pain affect the body. If the eater of the mermaid's-fruit be left undisturbed, he will not stir for twelve or even fifteen hours, though the first death-like trance does not prevail beyond an hour, or at most two: while, if forcibly aroused, he is so weak in body and so dazed in mind that he cannot long be kept awake without peril to the brain, and indeed to life itself.

It was because of this fruit of oblivion that Alastair and Lora had sought the Cave of the Sea-Woman.

They had feared not so much their own instinctive evasion of death as that, in the final struggle, they might not go down into the shadow together.

The idea that the Silence should come upon them unawares—that, arms about each other in a last embrace, the wave should encroach upon their deep unheeding slumber—had given them a strange elation. The thought was Alastair's. Though he was not a native of Innisrón, he had often visited it from Dunvrechan

even before he had come to love Lora, and was familiar with each of the treacherous caves and all the desolate, boulder-strewn, uninhabited south-western side of the island, as well as with everything in animate or inanimate nature which was to be found therein. Not only had he often heard of the sea-grape which grew almost inaccessibly in some of the caverns on the western side, but he knew where in the Cave of the Sea-Woman it was to be obtained with little difficulty.

Letting Lora's hand drop gently to her side, he climbed the rough, broken ledges to the right, and swiftly returned holding in his hand a cluster of limp leaves from which hung snakily several stems of the dusky-yellow fruit.

Lora looked at the berries curiously, and yet with a strange indifference. With that awful menacing sound of the sea beyond, with that more awful murmur of dread in her heart, with that rising tide of death all about them, it mattered little to her that Alastair laid such stress on those small, poisonous things, those petty messengers of a mere oblivion of the senses.

Just beyond where they stood, and at the beginning of those long, flat, inward-sloping ledges which formed the floor of the cavern till the abrupt ending over the dark chasm at

the extreme end, was a bed of soft white sand, shelving from one of the ledges past and underneath another, and then among rocks covered with bladder-wrack and adder's-tongues and other sea-weed, with tangled masses of the long, trailing dead-man's-hair.

Still without speech, here Alastair and Lora lay down, side by side.

There is an ebb in the tide of human hope that must reach a limit. When this limit is attained there is too great weariness for any further revolt, for any protest, for anything but dull acquiescence.

Slowly Alastair stripped a few of the dusky berries from the plant and held them in the hollow of his hand to Lora.

Taking them, she leaned forward, looking intently upon his face, but failing to see into his eyes, because of a deeper shadow therein than that which environed them.

"*Alastair,*" she whispered.

He made no answer; but wearily raised his hand to his mouth, and with his tongue crushed against his palate the acrid juice of the sea-grapes.

"O Alastair! speak to me! speak to me!"

He turned slowly. Then suddenly he put out his arms, and gathered her to his breast.

"My beautiful gloom—Lora—my Rest—my

Joy—O you who are my Pharais—all the Pharais I care for now or dream of—if there be indeed a pitiful God, He will have mercy upon us. If we do wrong, we sin believing that we are doing the right, the sole right thing. But sweet it is—O Lora, sweet and dear at the last, after all our dark bewildered pain, to be here and know that all is over now, and that we two go into the Silence together: and if there be any waking, that together we shall wake. *Mo ghràidh, mo mùirnean,* my dear one, what peace there is for you and me that I die thus: free from that crushing, crushing pain and darkness that has filled my brain."

"Alastair! O my dear love—dearest—shall we—shall we meet again after this dreadful night? Shall there be any day for us? I cannot die—oh, I cannot die in this awful darkness . . . thus . . . We are both so young . . . and I . . ."

She ceased abruptly.

A low splashing sound, with long-drawn suffocating surge and susurrus, told that the sea had begun to creep forward with stealthy swiftness.

It was not the menace of the tide, however, that froze the words upon her lips.

Alastair had begun to croon, in a drowsy,

yet strained, uncertain voice, a snatch of fisher-lore.

"Alastair! Alastair! Alastair!"

He gave a low laugh, as he turned on his side, and with wandering fingers played idly with the sand.

"Alastair! . . . my husband! . . . Beloved . . . Alastair! . . . Oh, say farewell to me at the least. . . . Do not turn from me!"

"It called—called—called: and she cried to me, Come, my Belovèd: and then I knew Lora was dead. Why do you laugh at me? She is dead, I tell you: *dead, dead, dead!* She, my beautiful Lora—my dream—my joy—she who to me was Pharais itself: she is *dead!*"

In the grip of supreme woe, a woman has a heroism of abnegation beyond all words to tell of it.

Her grief rose within Lora as a phantom, and chilled her to the very heart and to the very brain. But with a great effort she stirred, leaned over and plucked some of the fatal fruit and swallowed it: for she had crushed in her hand the berries he had given her.

Then, having risen, with deft hands she pulled toward her some long strings of dead-man's-hair and rope-weed; and, with those

which were firmly affixed to rocks or heavy stones, she wove a girdle about the waist of Alastair, and so round her own.

She could scarce see to finish her task, for the moon had passed upward into the denser cloud, and the faintly luminous veils of vapour beneath it were now scarce distinguishable from the obscurity all around.

The insistent wash of the tide was coming steadily nearer. She could feel the cold breath of its moving lip.

Absolute darkness prevailed; while, with shaking hands, having unloosed her long, black hair, she tied it firmly in two places with the curly tangle of him whom she loved so passing well in death as in life.

Not a gleam fell from the veiled moon. Not a thing was visible save a faint phosphorescent line that moved slowly inward. Lora could not see Alastair's face, not even his body, not even the two shaking hands she held over him while she prayed inaudibly, and with a suffocating, bewildering pain at her heart, at her lungs, in her head.

No sound came from the isle. The noise of the falling stream in the glen was merged in the confused clamour of the tide-race. Shoreward, there was that awful tidal whisper. Seaward, the march of wave after wave, of

billow after billow, in vast processional array; squadron after squadron, battalion after battalion, of the innumerable army of the deep: and among them all, over them all, beneath them all, a Voice, loud, reverberant, menacing, awful as brooding thunder, terrible as the quaking of the dry land when the hills o'ertopple the cities of the plain: a Voice as of the majesty of Death, swelling through the night with all the eternal pain, the forlorn travail, the incommunicable ache of all the weary, weary World.

Then, ere all remembrance died for her, Lora knew that Alastair slept and was at peace.

She stole her arm round his neck and held him close, but was too weak now to lean over and kiss those white lips, parted as a child's in dreamless slumber.

It was her last pain: the last unavailing bitterness of woman's woe.

Thereafter she lay still, vaguely hearkening the tide run up the deep channel beyond the little isle of sand, already damp with the under-ooze.

She listened to the slipping of the water along the ledges. A wave came out of the darkness and stalked through the gloom as a wild beast to its lair. Ledge over ledge she

heard it swiftly move: then suddenly there was a blank . . . a hoarse muffled noise . . . the hollow reverberation of the billow as it fell heavily into the black unfathomed gulf wherein at the flood was swept all that drifted into the cave.

A windy sigh arose in the cavern. The tide moved upward, feeling along the walls with stealthy, groping hands. A faint phosphorescence appeared momently, now here, now there.

The second channel, to the left, suddenly brimmed. The water spilled over upon the sandy tract beyond. Then a long rolling wave raced inward, leaped along one of its ledges, poised a moment, and, breaking into a seething foam in its fall, tore this away and that the weedy bonds which bound the sleepers.

Beyond, in the darkness, the loud moan, the deep, monotonous boom of the sea filled the whole vast void of the night.

V

The loud and terrifying violence of the sea throughout that day; the oppressive gloom of that night; the weight of undischarged electricity which everywhere brooded;

all made sleep impossible for Ealasaid Mac-Aodh.

So ill was she when evening set in, that she had moved her things from the bed in the second of the two rooms of which the sheiling consisted, so as to sleep in the box-bed in the larger, within sight and feel of the fire-glow.

She had not slept there since her husband died. Perhaps this was because that, even after the lapse of years, she could not endure the solitudes of memory. They had been lovers in their youth, she and her Hebridean: they had been lovers during their brief married life, ere he, after the too frequent wont of the islesmen, found death in the wave wherein he sought the means of life: and when his drifted body had been recovered, and laid in the island soil, she had remained his lover still. Doubtless, she thought of him even yet with his yellow hair and laughing eyes; perhaps of herself, too, as lithe of limb and with soft, fair skin as unwrinkled and hair as brown and supple as when he had first caused the trouble of a new and strange tide in the calm waters of her girl's heart.

To sleep in the bed where she had lain by his side, where a child had been born to her and had died just as with glad pain she had recognised in the little one the eyes of its

father, may have seemed to her a cross of suffering which she was unable to take up and bear.

Or, it may be, there lurked darkly in her mind the ancient secret Celtic dread of sleeping in the bed where any of one's own blood-kin has died: the dread of the whisper that is on the pillow in the dark hours, of the hand that gropes along the coverlet, of the chill breath that comes without cause and stirs the hair as it falls suddenly upon the cheek of the awakened sleeper.

On this night, however, she dreaded not only her own weakness, but the dark. Vaguely, she wondered how she had for so long a time slept away from the comforting light and warmth of her peat-fire.

She was so old, so weary, she thought pitifully. Would Duncan be sure to know her again? Why was she kept so long there, waiting for the summons that never came? Had God forgotten her? No kin had she: not one to claim her body for the place of sleep when her dark hour came. Useless were her days to all: to herself, each day a rising sorrow; each night a setting grief.

Yet that infinite patience of the poor was hers, that poignant pathos of womanhood in childless and husbandless old age, which to

the very end endures—till the last thread has been used in the weaving of the Crown of Sorrow.

Beautiful this austere Diadem worn by aged and lonely women: sweet-eyed bearers of crowns among the myriad procession of the weary poor of all the world, all going gloriously apparelled and wreathed with green garlands which fade not in the sight of Him who leadeth His feeble folk to kingship and honour.

For a brief while she lay brooding, with dull old eyes fixed upon the red heart of the peats. Then the gaze withdrew slowly, and the lids closed; as though a bird, flying softly through the twilight, had passed beneath the low-hung leaves over its nest.

She could not have been long asleep, for the glow was still ruddy upon the floor, when she was startled by a sudden barking and whining. She sat up, listening intently. She could hear no step, no voice. The whining terrified her. If the noise were that of a dog at all, and not of Luath or some other phantom hound, whose dog was it, and why its sudden appearance at her door at that hour of night—its eager, unceasing clamour?

But when, with louder and louder barks and an impatient scraping, the unwelcome visitor showed he was not to be denied, she rose, put

on her things, and then, having wrapped a shawl about her head and lit a lantern which she lifted from a hook, opened the door.

For a moment, she thought that nothing was there. Then her ears caught the sound of panting breath, and something wet and warm touched her suspended left hand.

With timid, yet caressing voice, she lured the dog across the threshold. The moment she could see clearly, she recognised him as Ghaoth, the white-breasted, tawny-haired, amber-eyed collie that belonged to Alastair Macleod.

The dog would not bide. His whining never ceased, save when it was interrupted by loud, eager barks. To and fro he ran, and at last sprang out into the night again, only to return a few moments later in a state of excitement bordering on frenzy.

"Some evil must have happened to Alastair Macleod," Ealasaid muttered, as after a brief hesitation she took the lantern and followed Ghaoth.

To her dismay, the dog tried to lead her toward the hollow of the moonflowers. Could Alastair possibly be there, or on the shore beyond? Why, if he were down there, lying helpless, the tide would be upon him shortly, and then his doom would be certain. Again,

of what avail was she, so old and frail, and now with some new weakness upon her? She feared she had not the strength to move downward in the dark through that dense jungle of white blooms: still less to climb homeward again. But while she pondered, she saw that Ghaoth leaped no more in the direction of the valley, but along the grassy ridge which led to the summit of Craig-Geal, so perilous by night because of the sloping, precipitous hole which gave entrance to the funnel-like passage issuing from the Cave of the Sea-Woman.

"Ah," she cried, as it flashed upon her that Alastair had fallen, or been hemmed in in the cavern by the tide, "God help him if he is *there!*"

With panting breath she hurried along the ridge, heedless now of Ghaoth, who had suddenly darted off to the left and disappeared among the moonflowers. She had not gone far, however, before she stopped. What use to hurry onward, if all she could do was to shout down into the darkness—a cry that would likely never be heard, and if heard would be of no avail to the hearer?

No sooner did she realise the uselessness of her errand than she turned, and, with shaking limbs and labouring breath, made her way along a sheep-path which led to the opposite

brae of Craig-Ruaidh, where Angus Macrae and his son Ranald lived.

So exhausted was the old woman by the time she had reached the farm and aroused the inmates, that two or three minutes passed before she could explain.

Ranald Macrae saw at once that one of two things had happened: either that Alastair had wandered to the cave in his madness, and there, ignorant or oblivious of the steps cut in the hollow columnar passage at the far end, been cut off by the sea; or else that he had wittingly made his way there, with intent to drown himself in the Kelpie's Pool—an abyss that never gave back what it swallowed.

It was during this hurried explanation to his father that Ealasaid learned for the first time the truth of what had reached her as a vague rumour in the mouth of a herd-boy. Eager as she was to be of help, she was now too weak to accompany the men, even if it were possible for her to keep pace with them, which it was not, as they had started off at a run.

She knew that old Macrae's advice was right: that she could best help by going home at once, and making preparation to receive Alastair if he were still alive. There was no room for him at the farm, where Ranald's wife had given birth to a child two days before. So

with little Pòl, the herd-boy, she set out once more, leaning often upon the lad's shoulder; and wondering if, after all, God were going to let her be of some service before he led her through the blind way till her hand should slip into that of her husband. As she went, she muttered to herself part of a rune now almost lost among the people, an ancient *sian*—that part of the *Tuaitheal,* beginning *Clogaid na salainte mu d'cheann:*

"The helmet of Salvation about your head,
The ring of the Covenant about your neck,
The priest's breastplate about your breast;
If it be rout on the rear,
The shoes of the Virgin to take you swiftly away.

Charm of the Three in one on you
From crown of head to sole of foot,
And the charm of the pater of the seven paters
A-going anti-sunwise and sunwise, sunwise and anti-sunwise,
To protect you from behind,
From wound and from slaying,
Till the hour and time of your death."

Before they left the farmstead, the Marcraes had provided themselves with lanterns, a long rope, and a pine torch dipped in tar.

As they neared the summit of Craig-Geal, they could hear the frenzied barking of Ghaoth

in the darkness down by the sea—loud when caught on an eddy of wind and borne upward, scarce audible when overborne by the moan and boom and ever recurrent breaking surge of the advancing tide.

At the dark circular exit of the cavern, they waved lanterns and shouted themselves hoarse: but without seeing aught, or winning response.

Angus Macrae silently drew back, rose, and lit the pine torch. Flaring abruptly into the dark before a gust of wind, it was like a blood-red wound in the flank of some vast black creature of night.

Having fastened the torch to the rope, he swung it far down the narrow funnel, up which came the smell of wrack and sea-damp and an obscure, muffled sound.

Still there was nothing visible. No shout followed the sudden glare.

The old man stood silent, craning forward with brooding eyes; for now he was thinking of the two sons he had lost. With a shudder, he moved slowly back and turned to Ranald.

"Will you go down?"

"Ay, father, that I will: if you will breathe the holy word before me and after me. The kelpie . . . the Sea-Woman . . . won't catch *me,* for I am sure of hand and foot."

"So your brother Seumas thought."

Ranald hesitated, looked at the cave-mouth, then at his father.

"Is it true Seumas died in *that* way?"

"It is true. The tide hemmed him in, and a heavy sea foamed at the mouth of the cavern. There was no chance but to gain some ledge high above the Sea-Woman's Pool. He did gain a hold on a ledge, for long afterward we found his knife on it. Then the accursed kelpie rose out of her lair and took him by the legs, and pulled him down, and tore him, and broke the bones of him—my son, my son, my beautiful Seumas!"

As the old man spoke, his voice had grown louder, his tone more intense; and at the last the memory of his loss so wrought upon him that, with a sudden cry, he dashed forward and whirled one of the lanterns into the dark, echoing chasm.

"Let me go, let me go," he cried, as his son tried to withhold him. "If she must have one of us again, let it be me! Let go, boy! You have your wife and child: and I am old, and have lost Seumas and Andras and the mother who bore them!"

Without a word, Ranald desisted. The old man went on his knees, crawled forward, and pulled up the flaming torch. Then, having fastened the rope round his waist and secured a

lantern to his belt, he slipped over the edge and began the descent, cautiously feeling his way with his feet as he went.

As he reached further and further into the darkness, he wondered why he heard no more the barking of Ghaoth. A grim thought came into his mind: the dog had been caught by the Sea-Woman, and was even now drifting round and round in her pool, strangled, with glazed, protruding eyes.

At last, both sight and sound told him that he was nearly over the abyss—sight and sound, and his careful counting of the steps in his descent.

The tidal wash, the heavy lapse and then heavier resurge, with the rush and cataract-roar of the seas as they fell far down into the chasm, assailed his ears continuously. Peering down, he could see the foam upon the flood, as it swept ravening round the cave and then fell headlong into the abyss, above which was a misty pulsating whiteness, the send and spray of tons of whirled water.

There was almost no need to descend further, he thought. The strongest swimmer, if caught in that inrush, would be swept irresistibly into the horrible caldron where the Sea-Woman brewed her spells of storm and disaster.

There was but one chance for Alastair; if, in truth, he were in the cave at all and still alive. A little way below where the islesman stood, there were three or four broad ledges of which even the lowest would still be unswept by the sea. He dreaded to descend; for it was on the first of those ledges that his son, Seumas, had been dragged, screaming, into the abyss. With a muttered prayer, however—a prayer that was half an incantation—he once more slowly crawled downward.

When he came to the third ledge, he stopped, crouched, and peered downward and forward.

For a moment his brain swung.

What was it that he saw? What fantasy was this? What horrible caprice of his eyes? Had Ghaoth slain the kelpie, and was he now perishing there with his teeth fixed in the neck of the Sea-Woman?

For Ghaoth, and no other, was the dog that crouched on the lowest ledge; and a woman it was who lay beside him, upheld at the neck by his strong teeth.

He saw the gleam in the dog's eyes, fixed upon him unwaveringly He understood their appeal. Slowly he unfastened and raised his lantern.

When he recognised Lora, he knew intuitively what had happened. With uplifted arm,

he let the light fall all around—above weedy, sea-swept boulders, and the dark, inward-moving flood, broken here and there into a seethe of foam that shone ghastly white in the lantern-glow.

There was no sign of Alastair.

It was clear he was either already swept into the chasm, or had been sucked seaward in the undertow.

With utmost care, Macrae stepped on to the lowest ledge.

Stooping, he looked intently in Lora's white face. Then he put his hand to her heart. He fancied he felt it beat, but could not be sure. Drawing a flask from his pocket, he poured some of the contents down her throat, then upon her temples and breast, with rough hand laving the spirit across the bosom, which, cold as it was, had not the unmistakable chill of death. A new strength came to the old man. He had lost all fear now, and had no other thought but to save this poor creature who had already looked on the face of Death, and nigh perished with the horror of it.

Taking her in his arms, he was swiftly securing her to his body by the rope, when he was startled to see Ghaoth, who had at once let go his hold, leap into the surge and swim seaward.

The dog went to its doom, he knew, in a vain quest for Alastair. With a moment's sigh, he turned to what he had to do.

An arduous and perilous climb it was ere the old islesman at last neared the summit, and felt Ranald grasp him by the shoulder and help him and his burden over the edge.

He would have swooned from the long strain upon him, had not his son hastily put the flask of whisky to his mouth and imperatively bid him drink.

As soon as he could breathe freely once more, he recounted what had happened. The young man wanted to go down at once into the cave and seek for Alastair, in the hope that he might still be swimming in the open, or be somewhere afloat, and that Ghaoth might reach him and bring him to the spot where the dog had guarded Lora—almost from the moment, though of course neither Macrae nor his son knew aught of this, when the first ledge-sweeping wave broke upon the sleepers and reft asunder their impotent weedy bonds.

But of this project Angus Macrae would hear nothing further. Was his son mad, he asked him, to believe that Alastair could still be alive, since, he was visible nowhere?

"No," he added, "he is in the deep sea by now, or lies gripped by the Woman in her

hole. But, Ranald, if to search for his body you are so fain, you can go down later. Maybe you will find the dog, though I think neither you, nor I, nor any one else will ever see dog or man again. Meanwhile, take up this poor soul and carry her to Widow Ealasaid's.

"She is big with child," whispered the young man, as, awe-struck, he wrapped Lora in his warm plaid and raised her in his arms.

"Ay: God have pity on this lost ewe and her poor, wee lammie. Be careful, Ranald, be tender—ay, as tender as if she were your own Cairistine, and the babe that is now moving within her were blood of your blood and bone of your bone."

In silence, and as swiftly as possible, the two men, with their still more silent burden, crossed the slopes of the ridge and ascended the grassy, boulder-strewn brae. In due time, they were met at the door by Ealasaid.

With a low, crooning wail, the old woman helped to lay Lora on the bed in the inner room. She had already warmed the clothes, and had poured boiling water in a tub, with hot flannels for swathing All island-women act thus on any hint of accident, for the hunger of the sea is the cause of nearly every disaster for them and their loved ones. Besides —had not Duncan Bàn once been brought

home, and all this and more done for him, though the chill upon him was not that of the sea only?

Suddenly she saw there was no time to lose. "Quick, quick, Pòl," she cried: "take a lantern and run like the wind across to the clachan, and tell Mrs. Mary Maclean that she is to come here at once, for Alastair Macleod is dead, and his wife is lying here in labour, and that the last pains may come upon her speedily."

The boy hesitated a moment, glanced at his grandfather, and then fled into the night, heedless of any lantern, and sure-footed as a goat.

Finding that he could be of no use, and that Mrs. MacAodh wished only his father to remain, Ranald Macrae slipped quietly away: and in a brief while had reached the cave entrance, descended, and searched vainly for any trace of either Alastair or the dog.

To Ealasaid's unceasing care Lora owed her life. The old woman seemed to have grown years younger. A new strength was in her arm, a new light in her worn eyes, a new spirit in her frail body. With deft hands, she rubbed the skin aglow, wrapped warm flannels about the limbs, breathed into breast and back, soothed the convulsive strainings of the sides and heavy womb, fed the unconscious

sufferer with sips of broth and warmed spirit, and often the while kissed the poor faintly quivering lips. It seemed to her as if her heart swam in tears; but with the unnoticed heroism of women, she let no grief overmaster her, no flagging of mind or body usurp her will.

In the outer room Angus Macrae sat, intent at first upon the keeping up of the fire and the fulfilment of Ealasaid's divers commands. Then, nigh an hour later, when through the open doorway he heard a strange moaning from the inner room, he sat down by the low, rude table and, taking the Gaelic Bible which lay there, began in a slow, monotonous voice to read from the page which caught his eye as he opened the book:

"I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

As he read steadfastly onward through this moving last chapter of Ecclesiastes, his voice

rose, and took a rhythmic chant, and filled the room, as a rising wind fills a valley set among the hills.

But when he read:

"As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all——"

he stopped abruptly, for he heard a sound at the outer door, and guessed, even before he saw her, that the comer was Mrs. Maclean.

Angus rose, and took her hand. Then, seeing the speechless sorrow in her eyes, he let go his hold of her, and, bowing his head, did not lift up his eyes again till Mary had entered the inner room.

He knew that, with those two women there, all would go well with Lora, if it were ordained that she was to live. But he feared that death was already entered in at the door; and he knew not what passionate sorrow might come upon and undo those who ministered to the woman, who even now was in those pains of labour that ere morn should end in the birth of a child. Long he sat brooding. Then, weary of his vigil, once more he began to read, resuming with the verse where he had been interrupted:

"Even so, thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all.

"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

Looking up, he saw Ealasaid standing at the door, a wonderful light on her old face.

"It lives," she said simply. "Mary said that the child would certainly be born dead; but it lives. She says now it has the shadow upon it, and must die ere long; but they told me that my own little blossom was strong, and would live: . . . and even as they were wrong, wrong also may Mary Maclean be."

Hearing a call, she turned, and went within.

The old ilsesman muttered for a while, with bent head and closed eyes. Then he began to read again:

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

"Hush!"

It was Mary who spoke. She had that in her face which made him rise.

"Hush, Angus Macrae. Truly, the eyes are the delight of the body, but this is not the time for the bitterness of that saying. Never for this child, that is born in the shadow

of death, and can itself live but a brief while, shall there be the sweet light of which you speak, nor the pleasantness of beholding the sun, nor the way of the day betwixt rise and set."

"Is the child blind?"

"Ay . . . blind . . . blind."

"And weakling?"

"Ay."

"And she?"

"God hath given her strength to endure."

"Does she know all that has happened?"

"If she did, she would be with Alastair. Her mind is dazed. She is as one distraught. My friend, read no more to-night. Go home now, and God be with you. Bring on the morrow what tidings you have."

Soon after the departure of the old man, a great stillness fell upon the house. Lora slept in a stupor like unto death. The child lay upon her breast, as a frail flower drifted there by a chance wind. Ealasaid sat by the bed watching. Mary knelt against it, crying silently.

Toward dawn, Mrs. Maclean rose, and looked out upon the chill dusk. When she came back, she kneeled again; and, in a low voice, repeated a strange Celtic "Prayer of Women":

O Spirit, that broods upon the hills
And moves upon the face of the deep,
And is heard in the wind,
Save us from the desire of men's eyes,
And the cruel lust of them,
And the springing of the cruel seed
In that narrow house which is as the grave
For darkness and loneliness . . .
That women carry with them with shame, and weariness, and long pain,
Only for the laughter of man's heart,
And the joy that triumphs therein,
And the sport that is in his heart,
Wherewith he mocketh us,
Wherewith he playeth with us,
Wherewith he trampleth upon us.
Us, who conceive and bear him;
Us, who bring him forth;
Who feed him in the womb, and at the breast and at the knee:
Whom he calleth Mother,
And Mother again of his wife and children:
When he looks at our hair, and sees it is white;
And at our eyes, and sees they are dim;
And at our lips, straitened out with long pain;
And at our breasts, fallen and seared as a barren hill;
And at our hands, worn with toil;
And, seeing, seeth all the bitter ruin and wreck of us—
All save the violated womb that curses him—
All save the heart that forbeareth . . . for pity—
All save the living brain that condemneth him—
All save the spirit that shall not mate with him—
All save the soul he shall never see

Till he be one with it, and equal;
He who hath the bridle, but guideth not;
He who hath the whip, yet is driven;
He who as a shepherd calleth upon us,
But is himself a lost sheep, crying among the hills!
O Spirit, and the Nine Angels who watch us,
And Thy Son, and Mary Virgin,
Heal us of the Wrong of Man:
We, whose breasts are weary with milk,
Cry, cry to Thee, O Compassionate!

Ealasaid trembled. She had never heard words such as these before, and was afraid; yet even more of the strange intensity in the voice of Mrs. Maclean, in the shine of her usually quiet eyes.

"God be with you, Mary Maclean."

"And with you, Ealasaid MacAodh."

Therewith Mrs. Maclean arose, looked at Lora to see if she still slept, and then went into the adjoining room, where she seated herself before the hot glow of the peats; and, as the day broke, read below her breath in the third chapter of the Book of Job.

Weeks passed, and there was no word of Alastair. For twenty days after the coming of the child, Lora lay distraught, knowing no one about her, though oftentimes looking long and lovingly in the eyes of Mary, whose face had won again an exceeding peace, and who

went, as of yore, girt about with a beautiful silence as with a garment.

But on the last day of the third week, Lora awoke in her right mind. Mary had given the frail, blind babe to young Cairistine Macrae to suckle. This was well; for had Lora looked upon it on that day, she would have died.

Nevertheless, in a brief while thereafter she knew all. It seemed strange, both to Mary and Ealasaid, that she did not appear greatly to care. She had that in her heart which would have enlightened them; but grief, as well as madness or evil, has its cunning, and so she veiled her purpose in absolute secrecy.

Not a sign of Alastair! This was what she could not accept. Till his body, or some trace of it, were found, she said she would not return with Mary to her home. Nothing, however, repaid the most scrupulous search: no clew was gained—unless the discovery of the body of Ghaoth, caught in a trawling net one night a mile seaward, could be called a clew.

On that day of agony when she had at last looked on the face of her child, and knew it stricken with frailty and blind for all its days, and heritor perhaps of that curse which had caused her to sin and incur this punishment, she had made a covenant with herself to go

down as soon as she could to the shore, at low tide, and with her child follow Alastair into that abyss in the cavern where she felt assured he had been swept by the sea.

Two weary weeks passed before an opportunity came. One afternoon Mary went across Innisròn, so as to reach the clachan and meet the *Clansman* for somewhat she expected: and as she was to come back with Ranald Macrae, and he was not to return till after dark, Lora felt secure.

Early in the evening, she sent Ealasaid on a message to Parlan Macalister's wife, who lived in a cottage about a mile along the shore beyond the promontory of Ardfeulan.

It was a lovely evening in mid-July. The moon was at the full, and made a golden dust upon the isle and a glory of pale gold upon the sea.

As she went once more down the hollow of the moonflowers—not so dense now as then, and many withered by the heat of the sun and the month-long drought—she stopped again and again, overcome by the heat even of the dusk.

In her ears was the bewildered, plaintive cry of the lapwings: and, as an undertone, the low, soft chime — the long, sweet ululation of the myriad-swung bell of the sea.

She was weary when she reached the shore. An unspeakable horror of the cavern came upon her, and she turned and went slowly toward the long sandy tract that stretched beyond the base of the hollow. There she laid the child gently down in the soft sand at her feet, and seated herself on a low rock.

After all, was it worth while to seek Death, when Death had already whispered that the little one was to be his own so soon, and had stealthily removed all but the last barriers that guarded her own poor life?

Would God not be even more wroth with her — punish her even more heavily; though this, indeed, seemed impossible?

How lovely that vast ocean veiled in violet dusk, save where lit gloriously with moonlight: how full of alluring peace, she thought that wave-whisper all around her.

Surely the music was woven into a song that was dear and familiar in her ears?

She turned her head away from the sea, and looked idly along the sand: though, as she did so, the vague strain ceased.

Then Lora stood, trembling in a great awe, and with a passionate hope in her eyes, in her heart, at the very springs of life.

In the moonshine, she saw a tall figure

moving slowly toward her, naked-white, and walking with a proud mien. The erect body, the flashing eyes, the grace and beauty, were those of a king — of a king among men: and as a king the naked figure was crowned, with moonflowers and yellow sea-poppies woven into his gold-sheen hair.

Suddenly he saw her. He stood as though wrought in impassioned stone. The moonshine fell full upon his white skin, upon the beauty of his face, upon the flower-tangle wherewith he had crowned himself.

Then, without a sound, he turned and fled like the wind, and vanished into the gloom that lay beyond the dusk.

And Lora, lifting the child and staggering homeward, knew that she had seen Alastair.

VI

It was not till many weeks later that the way of Alastair's escape from death became known.

On that dark night when he had lain down to die, the wave which fell across Lora and himself, and tore asunder the bonds she had woven, was followed by no other for a time: otherwise, the end of both would have been

attained. But so great was the shock, that his apathy of mind and body was rudely broken. The tired blood stung in his veins; the instinct of life was as a flame of fire that consumed all the stupor due to the sea-fruit he had eaten — an instinct that wrought him to a passion of effort.

Shaken and trembling, he staggered to his feet. Nothing but a profound darkness beyond, behind, above: a darkness filled with the voices of the wind, the seething tide, wave falling over wave, billow leaping after billow and tearing it into a yeast of foam — itself to stagger the next moment, and struggle and strangle furiously in a cloud of spray ere flung a dead mass upon the shore.

He had no remembrance of Lora, of what had brought them here, of the grave that was ready where the Sea-Woman watched.

But fear was left to him: and when he was aware of something moving across the ledges to his left, and heard it splash through the tide-wash in its effort to reach him, he gave a terrified cry, and dashed seaward to escape the grip of the kelpie.

Stumbling, he fell heavily forward. But it was into deep water; and, powerful swimmer as he was, he fought the surge, and so was not thrown back upon the rocks till, unwittingly,

he was caught in a cross-current and swept southward on the backs of the reeling sea-horses.

A horrible tumult was in his ears. The darkness was upon him as a heavy hand. As idle flotsam, the waves swung him backward and forward.

A deathly cold beset his limbs; then utter weariness. His hands ceased to propel, and only automatically and instinctively kept him afloat.

Yet even now, at the last extremity, when memory was no more, terror remained.

There was something swimming near, something moving toward him through the dark.

The next moment he threw up his hands, overcome by the sickness of fear and a fatigue that he could no longer withstand. As he sank, he was conscious of a body surging up against his; of a hot breath against his face; of a gasping whine against his ear. Then in a flash he recognised, or by instinct divined, that it was Ghaoth who had followed into the darkness, and was there to save him.

The dog had indeed followed, having but an hour ago escaped from the byre where Ian Maclean had risen from his sleep to let him out because of his ceaseless whining. He had raced across the island, and along Alastair's

and Lora's track, till he found them where they lay. Thence, after seeing the two whom he loved lying silent and motionless in a way that made him whine with fear, and knowing, as faithful dogs do know, that he must win help without delay, he had sped back to the nearest cottage. Once convinced that old Ealasaid was following to succour those whom he had left, he had sprung away again through the moonflowers, and had reached the entrance to the cave after fierce baffling with the tide-race. Just as Alastair had risen and was staggering toward the sea, Ghaoth had caught sight of him, and had plunged without hesitation into the black bewilderment of waters which had swallowed up the friend whom he loved with his life.

Fortunately, the spent swimmer was still near the shore — nearer, even, than when he had first fallen; for he was now close to the headland of Craig-Geal, and was already in shallow water, which swung on to a long shelf of sand lying against the entrance to another of the innumerable caverns of that side of the island. But here the sea, though at full-flood it covered the sand and moved its hungry lip for a few feet within, did not enter, as a beast of prey halting unassuaged at the entrance to its lair.

Ghaoth had gripped him by the hair of his neck, and was now struggling to reach the shore. Man and dog were still flung to and fro by the waves; but the living sport of the sea was no longer separate. With Ghaoth's help, Alastair made renewed, if despairing, efforts.

Suddenly his feet touched the ground for a moment. Then, with a staggering rush, having shaken himself free of the dog, he gained the shore, stumbled blindly up the low shelve of the sound, and fell unconscious among the soft, powdery grit, midway in the wide, half-roofless hollow known as the Cave of the Sùlaire, from the solan geese which often congregated there in the blinding snow-storms of winter.

Ghaoth stood panting beside him awhile. At last, with a low whine, the dog pressed his muzzle against the white face in the white sand; turned aside, whined again, and came back with lolling tongue. Then, suddenly, he sprang away into the darkness, and back into the drowning surge, with all his loyal, loving heart—beautiful love of the dumb animal-soul that God heedeth and cherisheth no less than that other wandering fire He hath placed in the human—eager to baffle with drift and billow till he reached the cavern once more, in

time to save Lora, of whose body he had caught a glimpse as he dashed after Alastair.

In time, and no more. He had not long rescued Lora, who, also, had been partially roused by the shock of the breaking wave. She had been half-standing, half-leaning against the higher ledge, to which, with difficulty and in blind instinct, she had clung; but, as Ghaoth reached her, she sank wearily and lay back against the dog, dreaming she had waked in terror, but was now safe in Alastair's arms.

It was thus that Angus Macrae discovered them. Long afterward the islesman recalled how he had seen the dog leap back into the darkness. Whether Ghaoth failed to reach the Cave of the Sùlaire, and was carried seaward by a current; or whether his strength failed him in his last effort, and he was swung lifelessly from wave to wave; whatever the first word of his fate was, the last was the finding of his sea-mangled body in the trawl-net of a fisherman more than a mile oceanward from Innisròn.

When Alastair woke, an hour or more after dawn, he remembered nothing of what had happened. His memory, though not killed,

was clouded by his madness; and, doubtless, the shock of what he had gone through, with the action of the mermaid's fruit, had further weakened it.

He rose and looked about him wonderingly. Around, were the precipitous rocks; beyond, the sea stretched far into the morning mists, calm, with a silver sparkle in the south-east and turquoise-blue elsewhere, except in green straits under the shadow of the isle, till it faded into opal and dove-grey where the veils of mist slowly dispersed, re-wove, lifted, in-wove, and sank to the wave again, or sailed indefinitely away.

Though he could still recall nothing of the past night, he recognised, as soon as he stepped from the cave and went down by the sea-marge, the head-land of Craig-Ruaidh and that of Craig-Geal just behind him. His one wish was to hide, so that none should see him. His fantasy led him to seek remote places, and to fear the face of his fellows.

Turning toward the sun, he looked scrutinisingly along the coast. Somewhere beyond Craig-Geal, he remembered vaguely, there was another hollow which led to a series of intricate and unexplored caves, perilous places of evil repute among the islanders.

If he were to go there . . . but at that

moment his wandering gaze lighted upon an object moving black in the shine of the sea.

Was it a whale sunning itself, or a pollack moving idly after the liath? Then he saw that it was a boat—one of many torn from moorings or swept from the beach by the recent gale.

So methodical were his actions, that none seeing him would believe his mind was so darkly veiled, that his reason was only partially in exercise.

Having taken off his coat, he wrapped it round a heavy stone and threw the bundle far into the sea. Then he thrust his boots into a cranny in a fissured boulder that at full flood was covered.

A few seconds later he was in the water, swimming swiftly toward the derelict.

While he neared the boat, amid a sheen of sparkling foam as he urged his way through the sun-dazzle which lay upon that part of the sea, he broke intermittently into a mournful Gaelic chant, but with words so incoherent, and with interjections so wild and strange, that the fishermen on a coble, hid in the mist a few fathoms away, believed they listened to a sea-kelpie, or to that vague object of their profoundest dread known as "the thing that

hides beneath the boat." They were southward bound; but at that forlorn wailing they hauled down their flapping sail, and, with their oars, made all haste northerly to their island or mainland haven. Not a man among them would have persevered in that voyage on that day.

Alastair heard the sound of the oar-wash, and ceased his fitful chant. It must, he thought, be dead seamen rowing to and fro, looking for the newly drowned to take their places as warders of the treasures and keepers of the secrets which lie among the weed-tangle and sunless caverns of the deep. At the thought, he laughed loud, but mirthlessly; and the echo of his laughter, falling against the ears of the fishermen, added to their horror and consternation.

With his hands gripping the gunwale, he swayed for some time to and fro, fascinated by the lustrous green beneath the keel—green in the sunlit spaces as leaves of the lime in April, and in the lower as emerald lapsing into jade, and then as jade passing into the gloom of pines at dusk.

At last he raised himself on the water, bending the gunwale low, and half fell, half crawled into the boat. Indifferently, he noticed that it was named *Fionnaghal*. Clearly

it had drifted away from moorings; for not only were oars and sail-enveloped mast lying taut under the thwarts, but a rope trailed from the bow far down into the water.

He rowed for some time. At last, becoming weary, or perhaps puzzled by the mists which crept behind and all around him, he desisted. A flurry of air struck his right cheek. Instinctively he put up the palm of his hand to feel if the wind were coming from the south-east or the south-west. Then, adjusting the mast and setting the sail, he seated himself at the tiller.

Eddy followed eddy, and soon a breeze blew freshly from the south-east. By the time the *Fionnaghal* was three or four miles to the north-west of Innisròn, there was not a mist upon the sea. Immeasurably vast it stretched; blue, or glittering in a diamond-sparkle sheen, or wimpling over in violet hollows, with the white lambs beginning to collect and leap merrily onward in the pathway of the sun.

Alastair became drowsy with the warmth of the glow upon his back and the chime of the sea-music. Long before noon he slept. For hours the boat went idly adrift.

When he woke, he saw an island less than half a mile to starboard. Looking northward, he could descry nothing but sea; to the west-

ward, nothing but sea; nothing but sea to the southward. Far eastward, a dim blue line of hills rose above the horizon: here and there—lying apparently against it, and scarce bigger to his eye than the gannets and sea-mews which flew overhead—two or three patches of amethyst. These were the isles he had left, though he did not recognise them: Ithona, most westerly; Innisròn, remote in the south-east; I-na-Trilleachan-tràhad, lost in its northerly purple-greys.

Though the words brought no meaning to him, or awakened nothing beyond mere visual reminiscence, his lips, as he looked at the island he was now approaching, framed its name, "I-Mònair."

Heedless of the fact that he was running straight upon a shore set with reefs like gigantic teeth, he tautened the sail and let the boat rush forward, and was almost havened when, with a grinding rip, the *Fionnaghal* stopped, filled, leaned over, and hung upon a jagged reef, as a dead body suspended on the horn that has gored it.

Alastair was thrown forward by the shock. Bruised and stunned, he lay motionless for a few seconds while the water poured over him. Then, rising and casting a keen glance around, he stepped on to the reef, sprang thence to a

rock nearer the shore, and thence to the shore itself.

As he left the boat, it split. The larger half went drifting on the tide.

He sat down to watch idly for the disappearance of the few planks which remained. Suddenly, without cause, he rose, stared wildly at the sea and along the shore on either hand, and then moved rapidly inland—often casting furtive glances behind him, now on the one side, now on the other.

No other lived on I-Mònair than a shepherd and his wife; and they only through the summer months. Sometimes weeks passed by without their seeing another soul: without other sign of the world of men than the smoke of a steamer far upon the horizon, or the brown patches in the distance when the herring-trawlers ventured oceanward.

No wonder, then, that Fearghas McIan gave a cry of astonishment, that was partly fear, when he saw a man walking swiftly toward him . . . a man who appeared to have dropped from the clouds; for, looking beyond the stranger, the shepherd could see no sign of trawler, wherry, or boat of any kind.

"Diònaid, Diònaid," he cried to his wife, who had come to the door of the cottage to

see if he were at hand for his porridge; "Trothad so . . . bi ealamh, bi ealamh: quick, quick, come here."

They stood together as Alastair slowly drew near. When he was close, he stopped, looking at them curiously, and with an air as if he wondered who they were and why they were there.

"What is your name?" he asked quietly, looking at the shepherd.

"C'ainm' tha ort?" he repeated, as the man stared at him in surprise and something of alarm.

"Fearghas McIan."

"And yours?" he asked of the woman.

"Diònaid McIan."

"Cò tha sin?" he added abruptly, pointing to the cottage: "who is there?"

"No one."

"I thought I saw some one come out, look at us, and go in again."

Fearghas and Diònaid glanced at each other with eyes of dread.

"C'ainm' tha ort?" asked the former, in turn.

Alastair looked at him, as if uncomprehendingly; and then, in a low, dull voice, said that he was tired; that he was hungry, and thirsty, and wet.

"Tha mi glé sgith; tha an t acras orm; tha am pathadh orm; tha mi fliuch."

"How did you come here?"

"Tha mi glé sgith."

"Did you come in a boat? Where is the boat you came in?"

"Tha mi glé sgith."

"What is your name? Are you of the isles?"

"Tha mi glé sgith."

"What do you want with us here, on I-Mònair, where we do no wrong, O stranger who carry your sorrow in your eyes?"

"Tha mi glé sgith. Tha mi fliuch. Tha an t' acras orm. Tha mi glé sgith—tha mi glé sgith—tha mi glé sgith."

Alastair spoke in a strange, dull voice. It would have terrified Fearghas and Diònaid more, but that the stranger was so gentle in his manner, and had a look upon his face that awed while it reassured them.

"God has sent him," said Diònaid, simply. "The poor lad has not waked—he is in a dream. God do unto us as we do unto this waif from the sea. In His good time He will whisper in the closed ears, and the man will wake, and tell us who he is, and whence he came, and whither he would fain go."

"So be it, Diònaid. You have said the

word, and a good word it is. When this man's hour has come, God will deliver him. Meanwhile, let us call him Donncha, after the boy we lost nigh upon six-and-twenty years ago, who might have been as tall and comely as this stranger that is now a stranger no more, but of us and one with us."

And so it was that, from that day, Alastair Macleod, unsought by any, and unrecognised because no one came near who might have known or guessed who he was, abode on I-Mònair with Fearghas the shepherd and his wife Diònaid.

He dwelt in peace. Through the long days he wandered about the shores. Often, in the gloaming, he sat on a rock and stared longingly across the waters for he knew not what, for some nameless boon he craved witlessly; stared yearningly through the dusk for something that lay beyond, that, though unseen, brought a mist into his eyes, so that when he reached the peat-fire again, where Diònaid MeIan awaited him, he often could not see to eat for a while for the blur of his slow-falling tears.

Week succeeded changeless week. The sheep ceased to look up as he passed. The yellowhammers in the gorse sang even when he

stopped brooding by the bush whereon they flitted from branch to branch, looking at him with quiet eyes.

It was in the sixth week, after a time of storm which had lapsed into another long spell of exquisite summer, that the dream came to its end.

Late one afternoon, a herring-trawler lay off I-Mònair. The skipper, a kinsman of Fearghas, came ashore to give and learn what news there was.

Alastair had come back about the usual time from one of his day-long rambles, and, as he approached the door, his quick ear had caught the sound of an alien voice.

Whether he overheard the shepherd tell his friend, in turn for the strange and moving tale of Alastair MacDiarmid Macleod, of Innisròn, of the strange visitor he and his wife nourished, with the surmise that he, Donncha, might be no other than the missing man; or whether some other suggestion concerning his removal or identification alarmed him, no one ever knew.

But, in the cloudy dark of that night, when Rory McIan and his two mates, Dùghall and Eòghann, were drinking the crude spirit from Fearghas' illicit still, Alastair slipped into the small boat in which they had come ashore, and

rowed softly away into the obscure and lonely wilderness of the sea.

Truly, as Diònaid said, God must have whispered in the closed ears, and told him whither to guide the boat, and when to rest while he let it drift, and when to take up the oars again. For, betwixt dawn and sunrise, the fugitive, oaring slowly out of a pearly haze, came abruptly upon the south-west of Innisròn.

With a cry of gladness, he leaned forward, shading with his right hand his eager eyes. He had recognised familiar features of shore and headlands. The whim took him to capsize the boat and swim ashore. In sudden excitement, he sprang to his feet. The little craft rocked wildly. The next moment Alastair had left the upturned keel to drift in the grey sea like a water-snake, and was swimming swiftly across the two or three hundred yards which lay between the island and the place where he had fallen.

When he reached the shore, he wandered slowly to and fro, his new-born energy having lapsed into a vague unrest. Aimlessly he leaned now against one boulder, now against another. At last, the chill of his dripping clothes gave him active discomfort. He looked doubtfully on the slopes, then at the sea, then

again at the slopes. With the strange impulsiveness of his disease, he turned abruptly; with swift, stumbling steps, crossed the shore; passed the ridges covered with sea-grass, and entered the shaws beyond. Thence he walked quickly up the corrie behind Craig-Geal. When he gained the upper end, the sunrise shone full upon him. Flinging first one wet garment from him, and then another, he was speedily naked—beautiful in his fair youth, with his white skin and tangle of yellow hair, which, as the sun-rays blent with it, seemed to spill pale gold.

He laughed with pleasure; then raced to and fro for warmth. When tired, he stooped to pluck the thyme or tufts of gale. For a while, he wandered thus circle-wise, aimlessly happy.

The day came with heat, and hourly grew hotter. Alastair was glad to lie down in a shady place by a burn, and drowse through the long, warm hours. As the afternoon waned into gloaming, he rose, and, forgetful of or unheeding his discarded clothes, wandered idly northward by one of the many sheep-paths. It was late when, having woven for himself a crown of moonflowers into which he inserted afterward a few yellow sea-poppies, he made his way down to the sea,

and hungrily ate of what shell-fish he could gather—briny cockles from the sand, and whelks and mussels from the rocks.

At the coming of the moonlight across the water, he laughed low with joy. It was only in the darkness he heard the Voice in the sea which called, called, called, and terrified him so even while it allured him. The waves, dancing and leaping in the yellow shine and breaking into a myriad little cups and fleeting hollows, sang a song that filled him with joy.

Then it was that, with erect head, flashing eyes, and proud mien, crowned with moonflowers and sea-poppies, and beautiful in the comeliness of his youth, Alastair appeared before the startled eyes of Lora, who, for the second time, had come down to that shore to woo and win Death.

When, late that night, Mary Maclean returned, she found Lora in Ealasaid's arms, sobbing and moaning hysterically.

It was long ere she was able to learn the exact truth, and at first she doubted if Lora were not suffering from a hallucination. But as the young mother grew calm, and took up her frail babe and kissed it with tears, Mary was won to believe in at least the possibility that the vision was, if not of Alastair in the

body, at any rate the wraith of him, allowed to be seen of Lora out of God's pity of her despair.

The night was too far gone for anything to be done straightway; but she promised to go forth with Lora at sunrise and see if that white, flower-crowned phantom walked abroad in the day, and was no mere fantasy of the moonshine.

She had fallen asleep when, at dawn, Lora aroused her.

Without a word, she rose from the chair, wrapped a shawl about her, and then, kissing Lora gently, looked at her with quiet, questioning eyes.

"What is it, Mary?"

"You still believe that you saw Alastair . . . Alastair in the body?"

"Yes."

"Then had you not better take the child with you? I will carry the little one. If he should see it—perhaps he would. . . ."

"You are right, dear friend. God has put that thought into your mind."

A few minutes later, the two women passed out into the cold, fresh morning; Mary going first with the child, and keeping, wherever practicable, to the sheep-paths or to the barren ledges that ran out every here and there from

the heather and bracken, and this because of the dews which lay heavily, giving a moon-white sheen to the grass, and sheathing every frond and leaf and twig as with crystal, glistening rainbow-hued.

They took a path that trailed above the hollow of the moonflowers, and led deviously shoreward by the side of Craig-Geal.

When they reached the summit of the grassy brae, where the path diverged, they looked long in every direction. Nowhere could they discern sign of any human being. Not a soul moved upon the upland moors; not a soul moved upon the boulder-strewn, rowan-studded slopes; not a soul moved by the margin of that dead-calm sea, so still that even the whisper of its lip was inaudible, though the faint aerial echo of the crooning of its primeval slumber-song slipped hushfully into the ear.

They were half-way down toward the shore when Mrs. Maclean, holding up a warning hand, stopped.

"What is it, Mary?" Lora whispered. "Do you see anything? Do you see him?"

"Look!" and, as she spoke, Mary pointed to a dip in the little glen.

Under a rowan, heavy with clusters of fruit, as yet of a ruddy brown touched here

and there with crimson, a white figure stooped, leaning over one of the pools wherein the falling burn slept and dreamed awhile ere it leaped again from ledge to ledge, or slipped laughing and whispering through time-worn channels.

He was like some beautiful creature of an antique tale. Even as a wild deer, he stooped and drank; looked questioningly through the rowans and birches, and then across the bracken where the sun-rays slid intricately in a golden tangle; then, stooping again, again drank.

The sunlight was warm about him. His shoulders and back gleamed ivory-white, dusked flickering here and there with leaf-shadows. A shadowy green-gloom lay upon his curved breast and against his thighs, from the sheen of the water passing upward through the dense fern that overhung the stream.

"It is the young god," thought Mary; "the young god who, Seumas the Seer says, was born of human hope, weaned with human tears, taught by dreams and memories, and therewith given for his body, Beauty . . . and for his soul, Immortal Joy."

But aloud she murmured only, "It is he —the Beautiful One — of the *Domhan Tòir!*"

Lora did not look at her; but below her breath whispered, "*It is Alastair.*"

Swiftly and silently, they moved forward.

So intent was Alastair, after he had quenched his thirst, upon what he saw or imagined in the pool beneath him, that he did not hear their steps till they were but a few yards away.

"*Alastair!*"

He lifted his head and listened.

"*Alastair!*"

The sudden fear passed from his eyes. A smile came into them, and his lips parted:

"Lora . . . Lora bhàn . . . Lora, my beautiful gloom . . . my fawn . . . my little one. . . ."

As he spoke, with low, caressing, yearning voice, he looked into the heart of the pool again, and stretched forward his arms longingly.

A sob behind him fell upon his ears. Startled, he sprang back.

For more than a minute, he looked intently at Lora and Mrs. Maclean. Then, slowly, some reminiscence worked in his brain. Slowly, too, the dark veil began to lift from his mind; slightly, and for a brief while at most.

"Mary!"

Mrs. Maclean made a step toward him, but stopped. The peace that was about her at all times breathed from her, and lay upon him. The benediction of her eyes upheld him.

Quietly she spoke, with her right hand pointing to the sobbing woman at her side.

"Alastair . . . this is Lora, who has sought you far, and now has found you."

"Lora? Lora is dead! She is a beautiful spirit, and sleeps in that pool under the rowan. She walked with me last night in the moonshine. She has a beautiful child that is our child. It is now a song, singing in the sunshine. I heard it at dawn, when I was listening to the stars calling one to another. It is a song of joy about the doorway of Pharais. I saw the golden doors open a brief while ago—the doors of Pharais. Our little child danced in the glory as a mote in a sunbeam. But Lora is dead."

"Hush! Lora is not dead, but liveth. Lora is here. See, her tears run for you—her bosom heaves for you—her arms reach for you!"

Slowly the dreamer advanced. He would not come quite close at first, but there was a wonderful new light in his eyes.

"Alastair! Alastair! It is I, Lora! Come to me! Come to me!"

"If, indeed . . . if, indeed, you are Lora . . . Lora, my joy . . . where is our child whose soul I heard singing in the sunshine over against Tigh-na-Pharais?"

Without a word, and swiftly, Lora took her poor blind blossom from Mary, and held the child toward him.

"It is God's gift to us, Alastair," she added at last, seeing that he came no nearer, and looked at the child wonderingly.

He advanced slowly, till his breath fell upon Lora's hands, and made her heart strain with its passion. Stopping, he stretched forth his right hand and gently touched the sleeping face. A sun-ray fell upon it. Then a smile grew upon the little parted lips, as the spirit of a flower might grow and bloom bodiless in dreamland.

Alastair smiled. With soft, caressing hand, he smoothed the child's face and little, uplifted arm. Then he took it gently from its mother, kissed it, handed it to Mary.

And having done this, he opened his arms and said one word: "Lora!"

None saw their return. Mrs. Maclean went before them with the child, and at once sent Ealasaid out to keep watch and ward against the coming of any one. Thereafter she swift-

ly made all ready for those whom God had lifted out of the grave.

But so weary was Alastair—so far spent by hunger, and fatigue, and exposure—that he could not put on the clothes laid ready for him. So Lora led him gently to bed; and there, after he had swallowed a little broth and warm milk, he fell into a profound sleep which lasted till dark, and then, after a brief interval wherein he ate ravenously, till late on the morrow.

From that time forth, Alastair's madness took a new form. All of dark gloom, of dread or vague fear, went from him. His reason seemed to be a living energy again, though still bewilderingly distraught at times, and ever veiled.

Nevertheless, that day of his awakening after his long, life-saving slumber was the last wherein the things of his past and the affairs of the present were realities to him. Concerning these, he could listen to little and speak less; and, again and again, his struggling thought became confused and his words incoherent.

Yet Lora learned enough to know what his one passionate wish was. Full well he knew that the end was not far from him; but before he entered into the silence he might live

many months; and he longed to leave Innisròn. Beyond words, he longed to die in that little lonely isle of Ithona which was his sole heritage from his mother, and where he had been born; for his father had brought his fair Eilidh there from his old gloomy castle at Dunvrechan for the travail that was her doom.

Upon Ithona no one dwelt other than an old islander whose fathers had been there before him for generations.

Seumas Macleod was at once shepherd and fisherman, and caretaker of the long, low farm-house: alone now, since the death of his wife at midsummer of that year. There was room and to spare for Alastair and Lora and the little one; for Mary also—for Mrs. Maclean never dreamed of parting from these her children.

And thus it was arranged, ere dusk came and filled with violet shadows all the hollows that lay betwixt the cottage and the sea.

Three days thence, late on a hot afternoon scarce cooled by the breeze that moved soundlessly though steadily over the upland crags of Innisròn, a company of islanders was met at the little western haven betwixt Ardfeulan

and Craig-Ruaidh. Every one on the isle was there, indeed, except the one or two who were weakly or in extreme old age.

On the water, moored to a ledge, a herring-trawler, the *Ellù*, lay with her brown sail flapping idly. In the stern sat Lora, with her child at her breast, and beside her Mrs. Maclean. In the waist, with a leg on either side of the seat, Angus Macrae, who owned the boat, leaned against the mast.

The islanders made a semi-circular group. In the middle were six or seven old men: on either side were the younger men, women old and young, and the children. Behind were the collie dogs, squatted on their haunches or moving restlessly to and fro.

Some mischance had made it impossible for Mr. Macdonald, the old minister of these outer isles, to be present. Father Manus, a young priest of Iona, took his place, and had already blessed the sea, and the *Ellù* that was to voyage across it, and those who were going away for ever from Innisròn, and the weary hearts they carried with them, and the sad hearts of those who were gathered to see them go.

Alastair, tall, frail, with wild eyes strangely at variance with the quiet pallor of his face—and to many there scarce recognisable, so

greatly had he altered—was bidding farewell to the elders one by one.

Not a word else was spoken by any than the familiar good-bye—*Beannachd leibh.* The hearts of all were too full.

At the last, Alastair came to where Ealasaid MacAodh stood, crying silently. He took her in his arms, and kissed her on the brow and then upon both eyes.

She watched him as he moved slowly down to the *Ellù.* He stepped on board, followed by Ranald Macrae, and sat down beside Lora, whose hand he took in his, and with the other stroked it gently.

As old Angus Macrae shook out the sail, Ealasaid suddenly fell on her knees, and, swaying to and fro, began a wailing lament:

"*Tha mo latha goirid,*
Tha mo feasgar fada,
O, oi, oi, tha cèo air a' bheinn,
O, oi, oi, tha drùchd air an fheur!"

My day is short,
Long is my night—
O, alas, alas, the mist upon the hill,
O, alas, alas, the dew upon the grass!

Slowly the *Ellù* moved out from the haven. Lora and Mary sat with bowed heads. Alastair had turned and was staring seaward,

where a glory of gold and scarlet was gathered against the going down of the sun.

> *"O, oi, oi, tha cèo air a' bheinn,*
> *O, oi, oi, tha drùchd air an fheur!"*

sang the islanders in a long, wailing chant.

Suddenly the sail filled, became taut. The boat moved swiftly before the wind.

A deep silence fell upon all. Then Griogair Fionnladh, the oldest of the islesmen, raised the pipes from his shoulder and began to play.

But the wild, mournful, plaintive air was not the expected Lament of Farewell. It was the ancient Coronach for the Dead.

One by one, every man doffed his bonnet; the white-haired elders bowing their heads, and, with downcast eyes, muttering inaudibly. Sobs were heard and tears fell; but no word was spoken.

When the sun set, the *Ellù* was far on her way—a black speck in the golden light. With the coming of the gloaming, the islanders slowly dispersed. Soon there was none left, save Fionnladh and Ealasaid.

For a long while therafter upon the twilight-water rose and fell, mingling with the solemn, rhythmic chant of the waves, the plaintive, mournful wail of the Coronach for those who have passed into the silence.

When that, too, had ceased, there was no sound that the sea heard not nightly, save the sobbing of the woman Ealasaid.

VII

Week after week, month after month, until nigh the end of the fourth, passed by on Ithona: and they who dwelt there took no heed of the passage of the days.

There are no hours for those who are beyonder the rumour of that "time or chance" of which the Preacher speaks. Day grows out of night, and in night fulfilleth itself again: the stars succeed the diurnal march of the sun, and hardly are they lost in his glory ere they come again. Scarce distinguishable are the twilight of the dawn and the twilight of the eve: and even as the coming and going of these similar shadows are the appearance and evanishing of the shadows whom we know for our fellowmen, so little differing one from the other, individual from individual, people from people, race from race.

And even as a shadow, to those who abode on Ithona, was that world they had seen so little of, but of which they had yet known enough.

In that remote island, solitary even among the outer isles of which it was one of the most far-set in ocean, there was little to break the monotony of the hours. No steamer drew near, save at long intervals. The coast-guard cutter arrived intermittently, but sometimes not for months, coming like an alien seabird, and as a strange bird of the seas going upon its unknown way again. Few even of the herring-trawlers sailed nigh, except in the late summer, when the mackerel came eastward in vast shoals.

Morning and noon, afternoon and evening, night and the passing of night, dawn and sunrise: these were the veils that seemed to curtain off this spot of earth. Storm followed calm; calm succeeded storm; the winds came and went; the tides rose and fell. In summer, the rains from the south; in autumn, the rains from the west; in winter, the rains from the north. Change followed change, but orderly as in processional array. The poppies reddened the scanty fields of rye; the swallows and martins haunted the island-ways; the wild rose bloomed, as with white and pink seashells made soft and fragrant. Then a little while, and the ling grew purple at the passing of the roses; the hawks swung in the wind when the swallows had vanished; the campions

waved where the poppies had fallen; the grey thistle ursurped the reaped grain. In summer, the Weaver of Sunshine rested there; there, during the equinox, the Weaver of the Winds abode; in winter, the Weaver of the Snow made a white shroud for the isle and wove a shimmering veil for the dusking of the sea. And as one spring was like another spring, and one autumn like another autumn, so was one year like another year, in the coming and in the going.

Save for the encroaching shadow of death, there was nothing to mark the time for the dwellers on Ithona. Mary was aware that not Alastair only, but Lora, was becoming frailer week by week. Lora, as well as Mary, knew that the child's face grew more wan and thin almost day by day. Old Seumas Macleod was weary at heart with the pity of all that he saw. Only Alastair was happy, for he dreamed; and his dream was of the loveliness of earth and sea and sky, of the pathway that came down from heaven at sunrise and led back at night-fall through the avenue of the stars to the very gates of Pharais. More happy, too, grew the others as the autumn waned, and the golden peace of St. Martin's aftermath lay upon sea and land; for their eyes saw more and more through the dreaming eyes of Alastair, more

and more clearly they heard strains of the music that haunted his rapt ears.

Daily he went about clad with dream: a strange sweetness in his voice, a mystery upon his face. His eyes no longer brooded darkly; there was in them a bright light as of a cloudless morning.

If, months ago, God had filled with dusk the house of the brain, it was now not the dusk of coming night, but of the advancing day. Fantasies beset him often, as of yore, but never with terror or dismay. The moorland tarn held no watching kelpie: instead, he heard the laughter of the fairies as they swung in the bells of the foxglove; the singing of an angel where the wind wandered among the high corries; whispers and sighs of fair spirits in the murmur of leaves, or falling water, or chime of the waves.

Sometimes Lora walked or lay beside him for hours, listening to his strange speech about the things that he saw—things too lovely for mortal vision, but ultimately as real to her as to him. Hope came back to her; and then Peace; and, at the last, Joy.

When not with Lora, he loved well to be with Mary or with Seumas.

In the eyes of the former he would sometimes look for a long time, seeing there the

secret home of peace, and perhaps, deeper, the unveiled beauty of the serene and lovely soul.

Seumas he had loved from childhood. The old islesman had never once been on the mainland; though in his youth he had sailed along its endless coasts. Tall and strong he was, despite his great age; and his eyes were the eyes of a young man who hears his first-born laughing and crooning against its mother's breast. Ignorant as he was of the foreign tongue of the mainland, ignorant of books, and unable to read even a verse in the Gaelic Scriptures of which he knew so many chapters by heart, he was yet strong in knowledge and wise in the way of it beyond most men. For he knew all that is to be known concerning the island and the surrounding sea, and what moved thereon and lived therein; and, in his humbleness and simplicity, he saw so deep into the human heart and into the mystery of the soul, that he was not ashamed to know he was man, nor to pray to God to guide him through the shadows.

It was from Seumas that Alastair, in boyhood and youth, had learned much, not only of his store of legends and ancient runes and old Celtic poetry, but also of that living poetry which makes the heart of the Gael more tender than that of other men, and his brain more

wrought with vision. From him he had first heard how that for one to have died is to have "gone into the silence"; that for an old man or woman to pass away in extreme age is to "have the white sleep"; that for a fisherman to drown is for him to have "the peace of the quiet wave."

Seumas had filled his brain with lovely words—lovely in themselves and their meaning; but he had made his clansman a poet by one thing that he did and said.

For once, after Alastair had returned to the West, from the University in St. Andrew's, he went to Ithona to stay for some weeks. At sunrise on the morrow of his arrival, on his coming out upon the grass which sloped to the shore a few yards away, he saw Seumas standing, with his wide, blue bonnet in his hand, and the sun shining full upon his mass of white hair—not praying, as at first Alastair thought, but with a rapt look on his face, and with glad, still-youthful eyes gazing lovingly upon the sea.

"What is it, Seumas?" he had asked; and the old islesman, turning to him with a grave smile, had answered:

"Morning after morning, fair weather or foul, after I have risen from my prayers and ere I have broken my fast, I come here and

remove my hat and bow my head, with joy and thanksgiving, before the Beauty of the World."

From that day, the world became a new world for Alastair.

In the quietude of dusk—and day by day the dusk came sooner and the dawn later—Mary would sometimes sing, or Seumas repeat some favourite Ossianic *duan*, or chant a fugitive song of the isles. But, toward the close of November, a silence fell more and more upon all. Each had grown a little weary with the burden of life: all knew Who it was that was coming stealthily across the waters, and for whom first.

It was on the dawn of December that the child died. It seemed to lapse from life as an ebbing wavelet from a pool.

The evening before, Alastair had carried the little one to the shore. He had never understood that the child's eyes were sealed, and often thought that it slept when it was really awake. When he came to a favourite pool of his, that at low tide was wont to flush with any red light spilled across the wave he held his tiny burden up laughing and crooning to it.

"Look, my pretty one," he would murmur, "that red light is the blood of your elder

brother. Fair is He, the white Christ. He has put that there to show that He loves you." Or, again, he would kneel, and with one hand warily move aside the bladder-wrack and other sea-weeds; and then, pointing into the translucent water, would tell the blind sleeper to look into the heart of the pool and he would see, far down beyond a vast vista of white columns, flight after flight of shining golden stairs, which led at last to a great gate flashing like the sea in the noon-dazzle. And at the gate was a little child like unto himself, singing a sweet song; and just within the gate was a beautiful spirit, whose face was that of Lora, and who could not sing as the little child did, because, though she was clad with joy as with a robe, in her eyes there was still a last lingering mist of human tears.

"And in Pharais, my bonnie," he would add whisperingly in the child's unheeding ear, "in Pharais there are no tears shed, though in the remotest part of it there is a grey pool, the weeping of all the world, fed everlastingly by the myriad eyes that every moment are somewhere wet with sorrow, or agony, or vain regret, or vain desire. And those who go there stoop, and touch their eyelids with that grey water; and it is as balm to them, and they go healed of their too great joy: and their songs

thereafter are the sweetest that are sung in the ways of Pharais."

Often Lora or Mary would be with him when he was thus speaking; for each was fearful lest some day he should discover that his little *uan* was blind, and could never even open the sealed lids.

But on that last twilight of November Alastair seemed to have been impressed by the passive stillness of the child, and to be troubled when he looked at it. He had kissed the eyes again and again, but they had not opened; he had whispered loving words in the tiny ears, but they had not hearkened.

All that night he was restless, and rose often to look at the two sleepers in the bed opposite his own. Just before dawn, he looked for the last time. He was satisfied now. The little one smiled . . . but it was because that in the soundless, breathless passage from one darkness to another, it had heard a sweet voice at last, and at last had, with suddenly illumined eyes, beheld a new glory.

So white and still was it that, when the cold of the tiny hands against her bosom awoke Lora, she lay looking upon it for a while, rapt in a new and strange awe. Then, having aroused Mary, she went to Seumas, and brought him into the room. Mary had already

waked Alastair, and he sat holding the small white body on his knees, stroking it gently.

When Lora told him that their baby was dead, and asked him if he knew what she said, he did not reply; but a tear rolled down his cheek, and he put his hand to his heart as though to still the ache of his inarticulate pain.

But after Mary had read from the Book of Psalms, and prayed in a low voice, all rose and passed out into the sunshine; and Alastair, already oblivious of his loss, went down by the shore, and smiled with pleasure at the leap and fall, and chime and whisper, and sweet, low laughter of the sunny waters.

About a hundred yards inland from the cottage, a gigantic pointed stone rises from out of the heather. It is known among the isles as Fingal's Bolt, though neither Fionn nor his son, Ossian, ever threw that huge, flat-sided, fang-like rock. A few rude lines and even letters are still discernible on the side next the sun; but there is probably none who could decipher that old-world rune, carved in bygone ages by the hand of a Druid.

Of all places in the island, except the rocky headlands whose flanks were laved by the sea, this Stone of the Past, as Seumas called it, was that most frequented by Alastair. At its base he had listened, as a boy, to the tales of

the old islander; beneath it, his fantasy now persuaded him, was one of the hidden ways that led to that House of Paradise of which he so often dreamed.

There the four silent mourners met that afternoon to fulfil the wish of one among them, who loved to think that his little *uan* would come back some moonshine night or in a still dawn, and, taking their hands, lead his father and mother by that secret pathway through *Domhan Tòir* to *Tir-na-h'Oigh*, whence, in good time, they would arise and go up into Pharais.

Lora had already been on the spot with Seumas. While the latter had dug the place of sleep, she, with white chalk picked from the shore, had printed in large, heavy letters these words upon the seaward side of the stone:

"Take unto Thy compassion this little one, and us who follow."

There were no words spoken as Mary, kneeling, took the child from Lora's arms, and laid it, wrapped in a white sheet filled with fragrant gale, in the wood-shored grave that had been reverently prepared.

The afternoon had grown chill. Seaward, a gray mass had risen as if out of the waste of waters.

All were still kneeling—while Seumas laid

turf and heather above the small wooden lid covering the narrow house that would give the body sanctuary for a time—when the snow began to come down.

There was no wind, so the flakes fell light as feathers, grey in the gathering dusk as the down that falls from the wind-swept breasts of wild swans in their flight to or from the Polar seas.

Denser and denser it came; soundless at first, but after a while with a faint rustling and whirling, as though the flakes were wings of invisible birds of silence.

The grey gloom thickened. Already the sea was obscured. Its voice was audible the more loudly . . . a calling voice; but dull, listless, melancholy with ancient, unforgotten pain and all its burthen of immemorial lore.

The four mourners rose. The two women, with bowed heads, murmured words of prayer and farewell. Seumas, crossing himself, muttered: "Deireadh gach comuinn, sgaoileadh; deireadh gach cogaidh, sith"—"the end of all meetings, parting; the end of all striving, peace." Alastair looked eagerly through the snow-dusk lest the child should come again at once and go by them unseen.

By the time they reached home, there was a thick twilight all about them. A little later,

looking out into the night, they saw the flakes drift over and past them like a myriad of winged things hurrying before a wind that pursued, devouring. The island lay in a white shroud. At the extreme margin, a black, pulsating line seemed to move sinuously from left to right.

Suddenly a deeper sound boomed from the sea, though no wind ruffled the drifts which already lay thick in the hollows. Till midnight, and for an hour beyond, this voice of the sea was as the baying of a monstrous hound.

None in the homestead slept. The silence, broken only by that strange, menacing baying of the waves as they roamed through the solitudes environing the isle, was so intense that sometimes the ears echoed as with the noise of a rush of wings, or as with the sonorous suspensions between the striking of bell and bell in monotonously swung chimes.

Then again, suddenly, and still without the coming of wind, the sea ceased its hoarse, angry baying, and, after lapse within lapse till its chime was almost inaudible, gave forth in a solemn dirge the majestic music of its inmost heart.

At last, after long vigils, all slept, though none so deeply, so unawakeningly as Lora.

Three hours before dawn the snow ceased

to fall. An icy sparkle glittered league after league oceanward, as the star-rays pierced the heaving flanks and bowed heads of the sea-horses which had abruptly sprung up before the advancing ground-swell.

The cold was the cold of the Black Frost—bitter, sharp as a sword, nigh unendurable.

Shortly after dawn, Alastair awoke, shivering. He rose, threw some more peats on the fire; and then, having dressed and wrapped his plaid about him, and softly opened and closed the door, stepped out into the snow.

His breath caught with the cold, and a greater weakness even than that customary of late made him reel, then lean against the wall for a few minutes.

Soon his faintness passed. The exceeding beauty of sunrise over that vast stretch of waters, over the isle in its stainless white shroud, filled him with an exalted joy. Thereafter, for a time, he walked to and fro; sometimes staring absently seaward, again glancing curiously at his shadow—scarce more insubstantial than he himself had grown within the last month, and particularly within the last few days—as it lay upon or moved bluely athwart the snow.

After a brief space, a rapt look came into

his face. He turned, and gazed expectantly at the door.

No one coming forth, he entered, and, with a loving smile, crossed to Lora's bed.

"Sweetheart . . . my white flower . . . come. It is so beautiful. Pharais has opened to us at last. I can see the steps gleaming gold within the yellow shine of the sun. Beyond, I saw a mist of waving wings. Come, Lora. . . . Come!"

Cold and white was she as the snow. Alastair bent, kissed her lips, but was so wrought by his vision that he did not notice the chill of them, nor see the blue shadow in the pallor of the face.

"Ah, *mùirnean, mo mùirnean,* see, I will carry you," he murmured suddenly.

He stooped, lifted the beautiful dead body he had loved so well, and, staggering beneath the weight, half carried, half dragged it to the snow-slope beyond the door. Gently he placed Lora down. Then, going for and returning with a deer-skin, laid her upon it, and sat down beside her.

For a brief while, he waited patiently for her awakening. Then his eyes wandered again, now fixed upon the majesty of the sea, reaching intolerably grand from endless horizons to horizons without end; now upon the

immense dome of the sky, where, amid the deepest blue, high in the north-west the moon turned a disc of pale gold out of an almost imperceptible flush, and confronted the flashing, blazing sunfire that, in the south-east, moved swiftly upward.

Suddenly he leaned forward; his lips parted; his eyes agleam with the inner flame that consumed him.

"Lora . . . Lora, my fawn," he whispered. "Look! The gates are opening! Dear, all is well at the last. God has given me back to you. My trouble is healed. Speak to me, dear; too great is my happiness!"

No sound: no movement of the hands: no stir of the closed eyelids.

"Lora!"

It was strange. But he would be patient.

Idly he watched a small, grey snow-cloud passing low above the island.

A warm breath reached the heart of it, and set the myriad wings astir. Down, straight down above the isle and for a few fathoms beyond it, they fluttered waveringly.

The fall was like a veil suspended over Ithona: a veil so thin, so transparent, that the sky was visible through it as an azure dusk; and beneath it, the sea as a blue-flowing lawn whereover its skirts trailed; while behind it,

the rising sunfire was a shimmer of amber-yellow that made every falling flake glisten like burnished gold. The wind was utterly still; the sky cloudless, but for that thin, evanishing veil of dropping gold.

The sea lay breathing in a deep calm all around the isle. But, from its heart that never slumbers, rose as of yore, and for ever, a rumour as of muffled prophesyings, a Voice of Awe, a Voice of Dread.

THE MOUNTAIN LOVERS

TO

* * * * * *

Dum juga montis aper, fluvios dum piscis amabit,
Dumque thymo pascentur apes, dum rore cicadae;
Semper honos, nomenque tuum, laudesque manebunt.

The Mountain Lovers

I

The wind sighed through the aisles of the hill-forest. Among the lower-set pines there was an accompanying sound as of multitudinous baffled wings. This travelling voice was upon the mountain in a myriad utterance. Round the forehead of Ben Iolair it moved as an eagle moves, sweeping in vast circles: the rhythm of its flight reiterated variously against walls of granite, gigantic boulders, and rain-scooped, tempest-worn crags and pinnacles. Lower were corries, furrows that seemed to have been raked into the breast of the hill in some olden time when the solitudes were not barren. Therein the wind slid with a hollow, flute-like call. This deepened into an organ-note of melancholy, when glens, filled with birchen undergrowth and running water, were aloud with the rumour of its passages. Upon the heights, upon the flanks, upon all the sun-swept mass of Iolair, the rushing noise of its

pinions was as the prolonged suspiration of the sea. Beyond the forest of pines it swooped adown the strath, and raced up the narrow neck of the Pass of the Eagles, and leaped onward again athwart and over the slopes of Tornideon that, gigantic in swarthy gloom, stood over against Ben Iolair.

In the heart of the pinewoods it was meshed as in a net. The sighing of it through the green-gloom avenues, warm with the diffused ruddiness of the pine-bark, was as the sound of distant water falling from infrequent ledge to ledge in a mountain gorge. Intent by the fringe of the forest, or even upon the underslopes still flooded with afternoon sunlight, one might have heard its rising and falling sough as it bore downward beneath the weight of the branches, or slipped from bole to bole and round ancient girths.

Here and there a hollow was still as deep water. Not a sigh breathed upon the mossy ground, thickly covered in parts with cones and the myriad-shed needles of the pines. Not a murmur came from the spell-bound trees. The vast boughs hung motionless in the silent air. Sometimes the upper branches stirred, but while the shadow-haunted plumes ruffled as with a passing breath, it was with a slow, solemn, soundless rhythm.

In one of those sanctuaries of peace, where the forest was thinner and everywhere luminous with the flowing gold of the setting sun, a child danced blithely to and fro, often clapping her hands, but without word or sound, and with her wild-fawn eyes ceaselessly alert yet unquestioning and unsmiling.

In that solitary place she was doubly alone. No eyes were there to espy her, save those of the cushats and a thrush whose heart beat wildly against her callow brood. She was like the spirit of woodland loneliness: a lovely thing of fantasy that might recreate its beauty the next moment in a medley of sun-rays, or as a floating golden light about the green boles, or as a windflower swaying among the tree-roots with its own exquisite vibration of life. So elemental was she, then and there, that if she herself had passed into the rhythm of her rapt dance and so merged into the cadence of the wind among leaves and branches, or into the remoter murmuring of the mountain burns and of the white cataracts even then leaping into the sun-dazzle and seeming never to fall though for ever falling—if this change had been wrought, as the swift change from shadow-gloom to sun-gloom, nothing of it would have seemed unnatural. She was as absolutely one with nature as though she were

a dancing sunbeam, or the brief embodiment of the joy of the wind.

As the child danced, a human mote in that vast area of sun-splashed woodland, the light flooded in upon her scanty and ragged dress of brown homespun, from which her arms and legs emerged as the white chestnut-buds from their sheaths of amber. Her skin was of the hue and smoothness of crudded cream, where not sunburnt to the brown of the wallflower. Dark as were her heavily lashed eyes, her hair, a mass of short curls creeping and twisting and leaping throughout a wild and tangled waviness, was of a wonderful white-like yellow, as of the sheen of wheat on a windy August noon or the strange amber-gold of the harvest-moon when rising through a sigh of mist. She was beautiful, but rather with the promise of beauty than beauty itself—as the bud of the moss-rose is lovely but has a fairer loveliness in fee. Though her face was pale, its honeysuckle-pallor was so wrought by the sun and wind that her cheeks had the glow of sunlit hill-water. In every line, in every contour of her body, in every movement, every pose, a beautiful untutored grace displayed itself. A glimpse of the secret of all this winsomeness opened at times in the eyes. These were full of a changing light. The "breath"

was upon her: on her rhythmic limbs, on her flowing hair, on her parted lips.

To and fro, flickeringly as a leaf shadow, the small body tripped and leapt. Sometimes she raised her arms when with tossed-back head she sprang to one side or forward: sometimes she clapped her hands, and a smile for a moment dreamed rather than lay upon her face. But none seeing her could have thought she danced out of mere glee. No birdeen of laughter slipped from the little lips: the eyes had a steadfast intensity amid all their waywardness. Either the child was going through this fantastic byplay for some ulterior reason, or she was wrought by an ecstasy that could be expressed only in this way. Perhaps no one who had met a glance of those wildwood eyes could have doubted that she was rapt by an unconscious fantasy of rhythm.

A stillness had grown about the heart even of the patient mavis in the rowan beside the winding shadow-haunted pool, a few yards away from the spot where the child soundlessly danced. A clear call came from its mate ever and again: neither feared any longer this dancer in the sunset-shine. The cushats crooned unheedingly. In a glade above, a roe stood, gazing wonder-stricken: but after a restless pawing of the ground she lidded her

unquiet eyes, and browsed contentedly under the fern.

Suddenly the dancer stopped. She stood in that exquisite poise of arrested motion which for a moment the wave has when it lifts its breast against the wind. Intently she listened: with eyes dilated and nostrils swiftly expanding and contracting, like any wild thing of the woodlands.

A voice, strangely harsh in its high, thin falsetto, resounded from the upper glades.

"Oona!"

The child smiled, relaxed from her intent attitude, and listlessly moved a step or two forward.

"Oona! Oona!! Oona!"

"It is Nial," she muttered. "I don't want him. I am tired of helping him to look for his soul."

The words came from her lips in smileless earnestness. To her, evidently, so fantastical a quest had nothing in it of surprise or strangeness.

The startled roe had already fled. The merest rustle of the bracken hinted the whither-away of its flight. Instinctively, Oona, noticed the sound, and her eyes looked beyond a distant clump of pines in time to see a gleam of something brown leap out of and into the

tall fern, as a seabird among green running billows.

Almost simultaneously she caught a glimpse of an uncouth dwarfish figure moving slowly through the pine-glades.

Swift as a bird to its covert she slipped into the dusk of the neighbouring savannah of bracken.

"*Oona!*"

The voice was nearer, but from its greater lift in the air the child knew that Nial had stopped, and was doubtless looking about him. She made no response. If the searcher were but ten yards away he would not have discovered her. No fox among the root crannies, no hare crouching low in her form, could have more easily evaded detection.

"*Oona!*"

The voice was now further away. Clearly Nial had turned westward, and was moving through the glade beyond the pool. Once more she heard the harsh, thin voice; but now it was crooning a song wherewith she was familiar, the words of which simulated the plaining of the wild-dove:

"*Oona, Oona, mo ghraidh:*
Oona, Oona, mo ghraidh:
Mùirnean, Mùirnean, Mùirnean,
Oona, Oona, mo ghraidh!"

Then the silence closed in about her again. A relative silence, for she heard the hum of the brown bee drowsily fumbling to its nest under a bramble, the whir of the stag-moth, the innumerable indeterminate rustle and hum of the woodlands in summer. The cushats crooned ever and again, hushfully nestling amid the green dusk of the boughs. A fern-owl swooped through the glades, whence already the sunset light had vanished, and after every short flight it would poise on a pine-branch and emit its resonant whir. In the hollow where Oona lay there was still no breath of air; but overhead the wind stirred the plumes of every tree-crest, and its voice, vibrant, full of rising and falling flute-like calls, loudly surgent, haunting-sweet, was audible on all sides and beyond upon the uplands of Iolair.

The gloaming, creeping from under the bracken and down from amid the branches of the pines, had begun to fill the forest with veils of shadow. It was for this Oona had waited. Gently disparting the bracken, and, herself almost as insubstantial and soundless as a shadow, with one swift glance around her, she vanished into the darkness that involved the columnar pine-glades.

In the dim, fragrant May-bloom there

seemed nothing astir save white moths, which flickered from bush to bush. The deer, if any were there, were resting; the roosting blackcock were as silent as the doves. The remoter dusk was full of the voices of the wind, but those distant aerial sounds were as the wings that fan the courts of Silence.

Shadow after shadow moved out of the twilight: soft velvety things, though intangible, that lay drowsily upon the boughs of the pines, or slipped after each other through the intricacies of the fern.

Round the pool were many of those lovely silent children of the dusk. Dim scores were massed under the branches, or crept among the willows. Some hung from the sprays of the birches, peering into the ominous blackness of the water underneath. Others, straight and intent, or all tremulous and wavering, stood among the reeds, the most sensitive of which had still a vague breath of sound. Many of these merged into the pool, but their ranks never thinned. By every reed stood a shadow, intent, inclined before a wind that blew not. Of all that passed into the water not one reached the star that gleamed and moved, and seemed to lift and fall in the heart of the pool. Not one crossed the faintly luminous semi-circle that lay upon the surface.

Each sank down, down, till the star in the depths shone far above. But by the upper margins of the pool, where the pines ran steeply toward it, one shadow sat that did not waver, did not mòve, that grew darker and more dark, blackly distinct, though all around was blurred or fugitive.

The night advanced. The shadows moved onward before it, or were enveloped in its folds. Though in the forest no travelling susurrus was audible, the wind had arisen again upon the heights. Restless, forlorn, it lifted its wild wings from steep to steep. Its vibrant rise, its baffled fall, re-echoed faintly or dully. At times there was a thin, shrewd, infinitely remote whistling. This was the myriad air-spray of the wind driven through the spires of the heather.

With the second hour of the night the moon rose over the shoulder of Iolair. For a time a gold dust had glittered along the edges of the granite precipices. Then the summit of the mountain had gleamed like a vast bronze altar lit by hidden lamps. Suddenly, almost in a moment, a gigantic arm swung upward an immense globe of fire.

As the moon rose she emitted a more yellow flame. Downward a flood of orange glory poured upon the highest peaks—barren, scori-

ated, lifeless, but for the lichens that thrive upon snows and chill dews. The globe—in which, as in the sun, could be seen a whirling of light—rapidly diminished in size. Less portentous, it swung through space in an added loveliness. Serene, equable, its yellow glow spread over mountain and forest, down every broad strath, each grave-dark glen, down every straggling hillside corrie.

The coming of the moonbeams wrought a fantastic new life in the forest. The lightward boughs took on a proud armour. The branches moved against the night, mailed like serpents with moving scales of gold and silver.

When the first comers reached the pool they fell upon it with delight. Forward they leapt, and bathed their lovely golden bodies in the water, which held them to itself with joy. A score died to make a silver ripple, a hundred perished to fill every handsbreath of water as with melted ore. When a water-snake darted from the reeds and shot across the surface, its flight dissipated innumerable vibrations and delicate fugitive cup-like hollows and waverings, aureate or radiant with white fires. A few fish rose from the weeds and crevices, where they had lain like drifting leaves. When their fins shivered above the surface there was a momentary

dazzle, as though a little flame of moonfire had fallen and for a moment flared unquenched.

The dusk-shadows had long vanished. Those of the night, sombre, motionless, waited. One only remained: the same sitting shape, darkly distinct, that had stayed when the twilight had waned.

There had been no movement throughout the long withdrawal of the light, the stealthy recapture of the dark. But when the pool, save for the margins, was all one wave of interlapsing gold and silver, the shadow-shape at last raised a shaggy peaked head. For a time Nial the dwarf stared vacantly at the transformed water. Then a smile came into his worn, fantastic face, so wild and rude, and in a sense so savage, and yet with the unharming, guileless, and even gentle look of most wild creatures when not roused by appetite or emotion.

The play of the moonbeams delighted him. When the last of them slid furtively through the shadows, and turned the reeds into spires of gold, he gazed mournfully at the gloom of the forest tarn. Nothing now moved therein except three wandering star-rays, that quivered and expanded and contracted as though the central phantom-flames were alive, and

were feeling tremulously through this dim, unknown water-world.

Once Nial rose. His small, high-shouldered, misshapen figure seemed scarcely human; the rough clothes he wore—patches of blurred and broken shadow they appeared now—might have been part of him, as the hide of a deer, or the fell of any wild thing. When he moved, it was with woodland alertness, with the swift grace of all sylvan creatures.

As his feet plashed among the shallows he stooped. For long he peered earnestly into the water. Then, with a sigh, he stepped back, and moved silently again to the mossy stump where he had sat since nightfall.

The late nocturnal sounds that prelude the dawn did not awake him, if asleep he were. The occasional cries of ewes upon the hills were only as remote falling waves in the sea of silence and darkness. The bleating of a restless stag ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

Just before the first trouble of the dawn these sounds multiplied. Ever and again, though at long intervals, there was the splash of a fish, hawking along the under-surface of the tarn for the twilight-ephemeridæ. The hoarse gurgling call of the capercailzie fell through the pine-glades. From invisible pastures came the first muffled, uncertain lowing

of the shaggy bulls, standing beyond the still-crouching drowsy kye, whose breaths made a faint grey mist in the darkness.

The wind rose and fell. It had now a different sound, as there is a different note in the ascending and decrescent song of the lark. It was, however, still confined to the heights and the upland moors.

With the first sunflood there is something of the same chemic change in the wind as there is in the sea. An electric tremor goes through it. Its impalpable nerves thrill: its invisible pulse beats.

Long before Nial, in the deep twilight of the forest, saw that morning had come, he was aware of it from the cry of the wind, as it leaped against the sun.

He stirred, listening. The call of that bodiless voice he knew and loved so well had suddenly grown clearer. It was as though the invisible Lute-player who shepherds the clouds with his primeval music had breathed a high, resonant note. To the keen ears of Nial this was enough. He knew that the wind had moved from the south to the north-west: a thing easy to tell at once in the neighbourhood of pines, but to be known of few when heard against remote heights and in the dark.

The dwarf rose and began to pace restlessly

to and fro. Once or twice he stood still and shook himself; then, with a searching but unexpectant glance around him, resumed his aimless wandering.

The wind reached the forest before the first lances of the sunlight had thrust themselves through the umbrage at its higher end. Nial heard it lifting the still air of the pine-glooms with its vast wings, and beating it to and fro, sending volleys of fragrant breath from swaying tree-top to tree-top. It wandered nearer and nearer: at first overhead, so that only the summits of the pines swayed southward, but soon it came leaping and blithely laughing through the long aisles of the forest. The indescribable rumour of the sunflood followed. As the old Celtic poets tell us, the noise of the sunfire on the waves at daybreak is audible for those who have ears to hear. So may be heard the sudden rush and sweep of the sunbeams when they first stream upon a wood. The boughs, the branches, the feathery or plume-like summits of the trees do homage at that moment, when the Gates of Wonder open for a few seconds on the unceasing miracle of Creation. The leaves quiver, or curl upward, even though there be no breath of air. It is then that crows, rooks, wood-doves, and, on the heights, the hawks and eagles, lean their

breasts against the sunflood and soar far forward and downward on wide-poised motionless wings: a long, unswerving, scythe-sweep, strange in its silent and ordered beauty, to be seen similarly at no other time.

The sound was an exultation throughout the forest. Soon the invisible presence dwelt everywhere. Every branch held a note of music: every leaf was a whisper. There was not a frond of bracken, a blade of grass, that did not bend listeningly. The windflowers in the mossiest hollows were tremulous.

When the sunbeams came dancing and leaping in the track of the wind, the note of exultation, in deepening, became more indiscriminate. The bleating of the stags, the lowing of the distant kye, the plaintive crying of the ewes and lambs, the calls and songs of the birds, the myriad indeterminate voice of morning, blent in a universal rumour of joy.

Nial stood listening intently, now to this sound, now to that. He knew the forest, and the life of the forest, as no other man could do. He, too, was a woodlander, as much as the deer, or the shy cushat, or the very bracken.

The birds that flew by paid no heed to him. He was watching a young fox blinking its yellow eyes from under a hollow mass of

roots, when a roe trotted rapidly close by him, her hill-pool eyes alert, her long neck strained, her nostrils distended and quivering. He turned, but she did not swerve nor hasten. Her fawn followed. It stopped almost opposite to Nial, looked at him curiously, lifted its delicate forehead alternately, and sniffed with swift sensitive twitchings. He looked quietly into the great violet eyes, filled with a wonderful living amber when turned against the sun. The fawn slowly advanced till the velvety warmth of its lips nibbled playfully at the arm, gently extended toward it. The dwarf stroked the smooth muzzle and the long twitching ears. Suddenly, with an elfish whisk, the fawn sprang to one side, spun with abrupt sidelong leaps around the funny two-legged creature: then, finding that its new playmate was so perplexingly staid, leaped away in a light bounding flight in pursuit of its dam, who had halted among the bracken, and had been watching curiously, but unalarmedly.

Strangely, it was with a look more of resentment than of pleasure that Nial turned and walked slowly toward the upper glades.

There was no one there to overhear his muttered words. Perhaps the wood-doves that watched him pass, listened unheedingly

to his angry exclamations—half sobs, half vague outcries against the bitterness of his fate that he, Nial the Soulless, was shunned by all human beings, or by all save the child Oona, and treated as though he were a wild thing of the woods—and that even the creatures of the hillsides and the forest-glades knew him, while not of their own fellowship, to be no human.

These thoughts always tortured him. His unspeakably lonely and remote life, indeed, was one long martyrdom. Rightly or wrongly, he, and others, had ever believed he was a changeling, a soulless man, perhaps the offspring of demon parentage. Had he been blessed with the mind-dark he might have gone through his span of life as blithely as any wildwood creature. Two things only, besides his human form, differentiated him from the birds and the beasts he loved so well, though from their world, too, an involuntary exile for ever: one, the faculty of speech: the other, the possession of a reasoning, if a restricted and perverted mind.

How innumerably often he had brooded over the fantastic, and to him part-maddening, part-terrifying, and wholly obsessive legend of his birth!

All in the region of Iolair knew his story:

how he had been found when a little child, in the woods, and had been taken care of by Adam Morrison, the minister: how when yet a boy, a cripple, and a trial to his foster-father and all who knew him, he had disappeared with vagrant gypsies, and had not been heard of for fifteen years, till one autumn he was seen among the pines in the forest of Iolair. He had been in the neighbourhood for weeks, though none knew of it. During that ensuing winter he was fed and sheltered by Torcall Cameron, or by Murdo the shepherd, or by Alan Gilchrist on Tornideon, the mountain on the north side of Strath Iolair. For the rest, he lived no man knew how, and slept no man knew where. He was an outcast and homeless: but if he lost much, much also he gained. He knew the living world as few could even approximately know it: sight, hearing, smell, each sense was intensified in him. He saw and heard and was aware of much that to others was non-existent or dubiously obscure.

But the real mystery of his life, to himself as well as to his human neighbours, who half-disowned him, was in the reputed fact that he was the child of the Cailliach.

A year before Mr. Adam Morrison had found the puny wailing child close to the tarn

in the heart of the forest, a man who lived high on Sliabh-Geal, the mountain that leaned southward from the shoulder of Iolair, had fallen under the spell of the Cailliach, the *beansìth* or demon-woman. No one knew much about him. He was a shepherd, but none had heard whence he came or of what folk. He asked none to cross his airidh. But the rumour was everywhere held that Black Duncan—all the name he was ever known by —was a changeling. The minister was wont to disavow this, but added that Duncan certainly lived under a curse, though the nature or source of the malediction was beyond the ken of all save the unfortunate man himself, if indeed even he knew of it.

One winter the Cailliach was seen of several women. Her tall figure, clad in a yellow robe, as she drove her herd of deer to the waterside, was unmistakable. She was seen again and again. The following summer, as Torcall Cameron was crossing the Gual, the ridge betwixt Iolair and Sliabh-Geal, he heard a strange voice singing through the gloaming. Looking about him, he discerned a woman sitting among the bracken, and milking a hind, the while she sang a song that brought a mist about his eyes, and made his heart throb. By her exceeding stature, and the yellow plaid

about her, as well as by the unknown words that were wedded to that wild song, he knew her to be the Cailliach. He fled, lest she should turn and ban him. A little later he saw the *beansìth* again. It was a long way off, but he recognised her: and even while he watched, she turned herself into the guise of a grey deer, and went leaping toward the high remote sheiling where Black Duncan lived. That autumn Duncan was more than once heard laughing and talking in shadowy places, and in the forest. On the first day of the equinox his body was found in the tarn. The face had an awful look upon it. The same afternoon Mr. Adam Morrison, going to the spot to verify what he had heard, found the miserable little waif he adopted afterward. No sooner had he taken it in his arms than a large grey deer sprang from a covert of bracken and leaped into the forest gloom. Despite its size and haste, its passage through the undergrowth was absolutely soundless.

The thing was unmistakable. The Cailliach had put her spell upon Black Duncan. When her hour had come upon her, she had strangled her mortal lover and thrown his body into the tarn. Then she had borne her doubly cursed babe.

All who heard of these things averred that

the child would be soulless. Mr. Morrison said no: that he would give it Christian baptism, and rear it in godly ways: and that God would have pity upon the innocent. The old people of the strath shook their heads. The minister was wise in the Scriptures and in the book-lore, but was it not well known that he knew little of and cared less for their treasured oral traditions and legends and obscure ancestral runes? Was it likely he could judge, when he barely knew who or what the Cailliach was? Had he not ever preached from his pulpit that there were no "other people" at all?

The good man was wrong. He admitted it, when, three years later, the child Nial—so called by Mr. Morrison in memory of a young brother of his own, and because he had refused to give the foundling the pagan designation of Nicor the Soulless—was lost one summer gloaming. When, after long searching, the truant was discovered, the child was no longer the same. The shepherd who had found him said that, earlier in the evening, he had noticed a tall woman leading a child through the forest, and stopping every now and again by some tree-bole, as though she listened for some one or to some thing. Later, when he was on the quest for the strayed little

one, and as he approached the spot where his search was rewarded, his dog had stopped, snarling, and refused to advance. While he wondered at this, a large grey deer sprang out of the bracken and disappeared into the forest. As soon as it vanished the dog recovered from its sudden terror, and ran forward, and was soon barking over the body of the child.

Before this misadventure Nial had been what Mr. Morrison himself called "a waefu' bairn." Weak and ailing from the first, he had grown more and more fretful: and his endless crying and whining had been a sore trial to the good man and to old Jean Macrae.

But after the finding of him in the forest he was no longer the same. He became strangely silent. Even when hungry, or when hurt or frightened, he made no sound. He would sit for hours and stare vaguely before him. It was with difficulty that he could be got to speak at all, and if it had not been for the minister's persistency he would have grown dumb.

The questioning, and yet remote, look in his eyes disconcerted all who looked therein. Old Mary Macbean, the birth-woman, confirmed the general suspicion. The child had no soul, she said: she knew the signs. The Christian

baptism and the constant prayers and heed of the minister had preserved or perhaps won a soul to it: but the Cailliach had found her offspring in the woods, and had lured the soul from the body, and had prisoned it in some pine-tree in the depths of the forest. Two or three years passed, and Nial grew more and more deformed, more and more unchildlike. Silent, morose, he was never content save when wandering high on the mountain-slopes, or among the pines, or by Iolair Water as it came swirling down its steep bouldered channels from the Linn o' Mairg. In one thing alone he transcended all the other dwellers in the strath, young or old. He knew every flower and plant and tree, every bird, every creature, and the haunts of all and the life of all, with a surety of knowledge and a profound intimacy that at once astonished the hill-folk and confirmed them in their belief concerning him.

Then there came a summer when he was hardly ever seen at Mr. Morrison's house. He lived like an outcast, and was seldom met save by a mountain shepherd, or by the two highest hill-dwellers, the widow Anabal Gilchrist on Tornideon, and Torcall Cameron of Màm-Gorm on Wester Iolair. Fitting company, it was said; for Anabal and Torcall

were not only voluntarily isolated from the folk of the strath, and held themselves strangely aloof, but were at bitter feud the one with the other.

That autumn a band of gypsies came to the strath. Some were brown-skinned and of foreign race; others were of northern blood and birth: a few were Celtic waifs, who had the Gaelic as their familiar speech. When the people of the dust, or the children of the wind, as the Highlanders call these vagrant folk—though commonly by the first designation—moved away again, traceless as is their wont, they took Nial with them. The winter passed, the spring, summer came again, and with the waning of autumn there was still no sign of the changeling. Year after year went by: and the story of Nial, or Nicor the Soulless, as he was often named, became vaguer and vaguer. It was nigh upon fifteen years later that he was seen once more in the strath. No one had heard of his return; no one knew of it except perhaps Torcall Cameron and his daughter Sorcha, or Anabal Gilchrist and her son Alan; when one day Murdo, Màm-Gorm's shepherd, came along the strath with the news that, as he strode through the forest at dawn, he had descried Nial—a ragged, fantastically deformed dwarf, aged in appearance as

though he were one of "the other people" who lived in the heart of the hills. He had recognized him in a moment; but had not spoken with him because when he saw the creature it was stealing furtively from pine-bole to pine-bole, and sometimes tapping and listening intently, or muttering.

"And what would that be meaning?" asked every one to whom he told his tale, though there was not one who did not know the answer aforehand.

"It means that he was looking for his soul —for the soul that the Cailliach won out of him and hid for ever in a pine-tree, where neither he nor any one else would be like to find it."

"Until the tree falls, by the hand of man, or by the lightning or the wind," some one would add: but at this Murdo would only shake his head, and say that the *beansìth* had for sure chosen a tree that neither wind nor flame could easily reach, and that when, after hundreds of years, it would be dying, it would die from within, and so kill the soul that wailed and wept or lay spellbound in misery within.

Thereafter Nial was occasionally seen. Weeks went by: summer passed, and autumn: and it was clear that he had come back to

stay, though he never once drew near the house of old Mr. Morrison, nor even sought out his foster-father anywhere, nor held converse with any one save at Màm-Gorm.

He might have been dead or absent, for all the hill-folk knew, had it not been for Sorcha Cameron, who told in the strath, on the rare Sabbaths when she came down from Iolair, how her father gave occasional shelter and frequent food to Nial: and for the confirming of this by Murdo the shepherd, who said that the dwarf for the most part slept in the woods, but as the nights grew colder had begun to take haven either in a cave, or in an old hut on the hillside, or at Torcall Cameron's sheiling.

"And I doubt if he would cross the airidh at all," he added, "were it not for that little wild-fire of a lass, the bit girlie Oona, that Màm-Gorm loves wi' all his heart and soul, an' better than his bonnie Sorcha, for all he leaves her to flit about like a spunkie owre the fèith. For Nial will speak to Oona when he'll not even look at any one else: an' the lassie will be awa' wi' him, an' no man kens the way o't or the whitheraway o' thae twain."

And so that winter went, and then another spring, until the coming of May again: and Nial was once more one of the people of the

strath, though hardly ever seen in the valley itself, except by the Linn o' Mairg or by the running water, and then only in the dusk of the morning, or in late gloamings.

II

The foreheads of the hills were bathed in light. Sheer above all rose the aureoled peaks of Ben Iolair and Tornideon. The lyric rapture of the morning made a sound of rejoicing. The bleating of the sheep was more rapid and less plaintive; and when the harsh screams of the great eagle, that had its eyrie far above where the mountain-shoulders almost touch, came echoing down the slopes, they were so mellowed at last as to fall through the leagues of sunsea in sharp cadences.

Mists veiled all the slopes, and hid the strath. The mountains seemed thus to be raimented in white and crowned with living gold. On the heights these mists moved with furtive undulations, with an upward wave which ever and again lifted a great mass of vapour columnarly toward the summits.

Beneath, they lay like suspended snow, or hung as palls: vast draperies of unrevealed day.

Even though the sunflood broke into these cohorts, and here seemed to suck with thirsty flaming tongues, here to plunge in golden billows among shallows of fading shadow, or here with a giant hand withdrew, rent, swept away, dissipated the ever dissolving, ever reforming battalions of rising mist—yet, as the morning advanced, the highland was still swathed.

Sometimes a boulder, at a vast height, would stand disclosed. The wet upon it, from granite boss and yellow lichen, shimmered as though the fairy-folk who weave the rainbows were there at work. A space below would give way to the sudden leap of the hill-wind; and with a rush the sunlight would stream forward. Pine after pine would rear a green banner, from which mist-veils would float, or rise and sway like flags of a marching army. Then the ranks would close in again. Flying columns would converge from right and left; the pine-banners would vanish, as though in the smoke of battle: a mighty swaying mass would sweep upward, absorb the sunbeams and splinter their gleaming lances, till boulder after boulder would be captured and the bastioned heights themselves be environed in the assault.

From the narrow loch at the end of the

ravine, in the Pass of the Eagles, came the clamour of wildfowl. Now here, now there, as though a voice swam disembodied in that white sea, the double note of the cuckoo resounded. In a thick sob, the echo of the Linn o' Mairg came heavily at intervals. The muffled noise of Mairg Water crawled through the caverns of the mist.

Though the two mountain-buttresses at the head of the pass are so close that the legend of a stag having taken the intervening space at a bound is not wholly incredible, it was impossible for one hid in the mist on Maol-Gorm of Iolair to see any one or anything on Maol-dubh of Tornideon. But through the mist, here suffused with a pale golden light, was audible on both spurs the bleating of travelling sheep and the barking of a dog, with, now and again, the lowing of cows.

Suddenly a voice rang out, strong, clear, and blithe:

" Mo rùn geal, dìleas,
Dìleas, dìleas,
Mo rùn geal, dìleas
Nach till thunall!"

Upon the spring of the last word came back from Iolair a voice as blithe and more sweet,

the voice of a woman, with the lilt of a bird in it and all the joy of the sunshine:

> *"I go where the sheep go,*
> *With the sheep are my feet:*
> *I go where the kye go,*
> *Their breath is so sweet:*
> *O lover who loves me,*
> *Art thou half so fleet?*
> *Where the sheep climb, the kye go,*
> *There shall we meet!"*

There was something so penetratingly sweet and joyous in the song that it stirred every bird on the hillside. The larks rose through the mist till they swam into the sunflood; the linties and shilfas and yellow-yites sent thrilling notes from gorse-bush to gorse-bush and from rowan to rowan. In the birk-shaws, the cries of the merles sounded like shrill flutes.

To and fro went the sweet voices. Now the man's on Tornideon would ring blithely, now the woman's on Iolair respond.

At last, as the cattle moved up the slopes, with the spreading sheep in advance, the shepherding voices fell further apart. Instinct led the kye to the sunlight, for all living things have their joy through the eyes.

"Sorcha, Sorcha, Sorcha!" came ringing

through the mist: "*Sorcha-mo-ciatach-nionag!*"

"*Tha, Ailean-a-ghaolach!*" came back, with a ripple of laughter, the laughter of joy.[1]

"Ah mo cailin geal, mo nighean donn, duit ciat mhor!"

"Duit cíat, no runach!"[2]

"The sheep and the kye don't know love, Sorcha, or they would stay here till the mists go, and then we would see each other."

"Let us cry *dcasiul,* and turn thrice sunways!"

"Ay; and meanwhile the beasts won't stand still! That evil beast of a bull, Donncha-dhu, who ought to be called Domnuill-dhu, is leading the way over the shoulder of Maol-Gorm. I must go, Sorcha-mo-ghraidh, or never a sheep will I find again; and as for the kye, they'll go smelling the four winds. *Sorcha! Sorcha!* Can you hear?"

Hear came back in a sweet falling echo, the more remote and aerial because of the mist.

[1] "Sorcha, my bonnie lassie." "Yes, Alan, my darling."

[2] "Ah, my fair one, my dark-haired lass, joy be on you!"— "And joy on you, my loved-in-secret."

Infra: Domnuill-dubh instead of Donncha-dubh: *i.e.* "should be called Black Donald instead of Black Duncan." It is a play upon words: for "Black Donald" is the Highland colloquialism for Satan.

"Come down to-night after the milking, and meet me at the Linn. . . . Sorcha! I'm going to see Mr. Morrison again!"

"'Tis no use, Alan. But I'll meet you at the Linn in the late gloaming."

"*Sorcha!*"

"*Alan!*"

Then, fainter and fainter, *Sorcha!* . . . *Alan!* And at last no response came when Alan Gilchrist cried, with a prolonged echoing call, the name of his *ghaolaichc*, his heart's joy.

Soon thereafter the mists began to disperse.

Alan Gilchrist was at the pool, below the Linn o' Mairg, long before Sorcha Cameron came down from Màm-Gorm, the hill-farm on Iolair, by the circuitous but secluded way through the pine-glades.

For an hour or more he had lain there, dreaming. The first green breath of May was sweet upon the land: already a warmth as of midsummer was in the air. Pleasant it was to lie and dream by the running water.

When he had first reached the Mairg Water, after his fruitless journey to Inverglas,

the village of Strath Iolair, he had thrown himself down among the fern, in the shadow of a boulder overlooking the Kelpie's Pool. Angry thoughts were in his mind, because of the minister's refusal to marry Sorcha and himself. It was a bitter thing, he thought, and unjust.

For that noontide, after he had driven the sheep on to the upper pastures upon Tornideon, and had got little Davie Niven, of Clachan-nan-Creag, to herd the sheep for him till moonrise, he had gone down by his home at Ardoch-Beag, itself high on the mountain-side—though he was little there during the summer-pasturing on the hills—to the strath, and so by the road to Inverglas. As he went through the village, there were many who looked at him with glad eyes: for wherever he went Alan found a smile of welcome for him, partly because of the beauty of his tall person and curly yellow hair, which made the strath women call him *Alan-aluinn*, Alan-fair-to-see, but more perhaps of his own smile that was so sweet out of his blue eyes, and for the grave yet winning way of him. His rival, Duncan Robertson, spoke of him contemptuously as "the man for women and children"; but, as others besides Duncan Robertson knew well, the women's-man and the

children's-man could also be the best man's-man in the strath when occasion required.

This early afternoon, however, he had no wish to speak with any, and so hurried on, with a visit only to old Morag Niven, Davie the herd-laddie's grandmother. The small, douce, wizened old woman blessed him for what he brought her, and insisted on telling his fortune again by the lines in his hands. Laughingly he assured her she had told it to him so often that he was beginning not to believe in her predictions at all.

"That may be," she exclaimed, half-pettishly: "but it's this I'm telling you, Alan Mac Fergus, and what's more, it's not only the 'vision' of the love that's coming to you, but I've had the 'sight' on the lover too!"

The young man flushed, but answered carelessly:

"Good for you, Mùimé: but sure 'tis a risky thing to be seeing too much."

The old woman stared keenly at him for a moment, and then smiled.

"Well, and will this, then, be like what you have seen in your dreams, if ever a great *oganach* like you dreams at all:

"*First:* She is beautiful as this May day.

"*Second:* She is tall and graceful as a young pine, and moves like a hind upon the

hills, an' no flower sways in the wind more dainty-sweet than she.

"*Third:* She is fair of face, with all the soft skin of her like new milk. But her hair is dark, like the woods at dusk, and fragrant as they.

"*Fourth:* She lives at a mountain-farm, and all her heart is in a man's keeping, and all her beauty is his to love, and she is the tallest, and strongest, and sweetest lass in all the strath or in the big world beyond, and as beautiful as Roscrana that was wife to Fingal of old and mother of Ossian the blind bard—ay, good as Morna, which is the name of a woman that is beloved by all, and fair-to-see as Fiona, which is the name given of old to a bonnie maid, and lovely as Alona, than whom not woman could be lovelier.

"*Fifth:* And the man she loves is a poor misguidit wastrel who lives on a hill opposite to her, and I'm thinkin' his name will be Alan too, Alan this or Alan that.

"*Sixth:* 'Tis Himself only, praise be to Him, who knows who this Morna-Fiona-Alona may be: but in a dream I had, I'm thinkin' her name is Sorcha.

"*And Seventh*" (*this in a relapse from Gaellic into the Lowland tongue*): "I may be a silly auld wife, Alan my man, but I'm na

sae blind as ta fail ta see through a split poke, for a' yer havers and blethers!"

With a shamefaced laugh Alan told her she was an old witch, and was sheer doited at that! Then, suddenly stooping and kissing her grey hair, he bade her good-bye, and went on his way.

But it was an ill-faring. Mr. Morrison, the tall, dark-faced minister, gray and lank as an old fox, though a godly man, would have nothing to say to the granting of his request.

"No, no, Alan Gilchrist," he added in parting, and in a not unkindly tone, "'tis no ill-will I am bearing you, my lad. But neither I nor any true minister of God will wed you and Sorcha Cameron, because of the feud between Torcall her father and Anabal your mother, and of the ban laid by him on her, and by her on you."

"So be it, Mr. Morrison; but as for me, I will be putting up with no banning from man or woman—no, not I, nor Sorcha either!"

"That is a wicked thing for you to say. But Sorcha is a good lass if you're not a good lad, and . . . and . . . the long and short of it is, I can't and won't wed you and her . . . no, not though your mother and Sorcha's father were to die, and that I avow here solemnly, to the stones be it said."

And so it was that the young man went away wrathful and indignant. Yet, with every mile of his homeward journey he cared less and less. After all, what did it matter to him or Sorcha? Living remote upon the solitary hills, and rarely seeing the people of the strath, what did it avail whether or no he and she were "blessed" by Mr. Morrison? Well, he had done what he could.

He knew of course, of the heavy weight of a parental ban; how, with some, it was a command as sacred and inviolable as those of God. But he did not know all that Mr. Morrison knew or surmised: wherein, indeed, was the deeper reason of the refusal.

"The child Oona, the child Oona," muttered the minister as he returned to his house; "why was she sent by Anabal, as soon as might be after birth, to Torcall Cameron? And why was he stricken blind, he there alone on Màm-Gorm, with Marsail, his wife, long dead, and only his daughter, Sorcha, sweet lass, beside him: stricken of God, blind and desolate for all his days thereafter? Alas, too, what of the doom of Fergus, her husband!"

But, lying by the running water of Mairg, Alan, at last oblivious of what had angered him and left in his mind a vague distress, pondered other and dearer things than these.

His heart was full of Sorcha. Already, as indeed for more than a month past, there was upon him that trance of love of which the old Celtic poets speak. Even now he went daily in a dream. Malveen, the widow-mother of Davie the herd-laddie, saw him often as he passed to and fro upon the hill-side, as one in a vision, rapt, with shining eyes. At times, too, unknown of either, she caught a glimpse of Alan and Sorcha as they kept tryst in the gloamings. She mothered them with the longing woman's joy in love that had never been hers; they were her dear ones, though rare it was that she had word of either. The youth of youths, the maid of maids: to her at last something more than real and familiar, remote as they were in the glamour that was about them as the Mountain Lovers.

It was in the late gloaming, as she had promised, that Sorcha stole soundlessly from the forest, and was in Alan's arms almost before he knew that the tryst was kept.

III

Volumes of grey-black cloud swept up the flanks of Iolair. The breath of the south-

west wind fell moist upon the land. All the wonderful colour of the highland seemed absorbed, as though a sponge had been passed over it. The after-gloom was enhanced by the silence which prevailed, for the thunderous weight in the air hushed the birds. Even the corbies sat sullenly on stone dyke or solitary quicken.

Up at the farm of Màm-Gorm the cloud-skirts went trailing by, sometimes enveloping the whole airidh in a clinging obscurity, and ever and again lifting high above it as though with a spasmodic leap.

A few yards from the door of the low whitewashed house Torcall Cameron stood, his gaunt figure, with its mass of tangled iron-grey hair, thrown into strong relief. Though he grasped a heavy oaken staff, his head was uncovered. From this, Nial inferred that "Màm-Gorm" was not going far: of which he was glad, for there was no one in the house, wild weather was nigh, and it was not a time for a blind man to wander among the hills, with the sheep-paths damp and slippery and often obliterated in the moist peat.

For, though Màm-Gorm thought he was alone, Nial had been his silent companion for an hour past. Sorcha, he knew, was up at the high sheiling on Iolair, with the cows:

Oona, he imagined, was either wandering after the sheep with Murdo the shepherd, or was in the forest with Nial, or might be flitting here and there on the slopes like the wild fawn she was. As for Nial, Torcall Cameron rarely gave him a thought. The dwarf was like a faithful collie: to be fed, and given a kindly clap now and then, while his gratitude and devotion were taken for granted.

This rough, stern, blind, and stricken giant was a divine being to the poor child of the woods. In a vague way Nial thought of Màm-Gord as God: like Màm-Gorm, God could provide, could at rare times be tender and pitiful, could be stern, morose, forbidding, terrible in wrath, of a swift avenging spirit, could strike, bruise, drive forth, kill.

When Sorcha had left at sunrise she knew that her father had the gloom upon him. In vain she looked here and there for Oona. The child had vanished. The platter in which she had her porridge was found under a bench near the rowan at the side of the house—where, indeed, Sorcha had looked for it, as she knew Oona's frequent way of carrying her food out-of-door, and eating it in a hollow below a rock, or under a tree, or even beneath the bench, like a little wild thing.

She had turned, after she had called Fionn

and Donn, the dogs, and gone back to the house, and kissed her father. His blind eyes were upon her, though it was not through them that he knew she was troubled. He felt the sweet breath of her upon his brow. It was like the first day of spring when she kissed him, but he did not smile. Before she went away with the cows she found Nial, and bade him keep watch and ward, though without letting himself be seen.

But all morning and noon Torcall Cameron had sat brooding by the peats. At the turn of the day he rose, ate some of the bread and cold porridge which, with a jug of milk, Sorcha had set on the table beside him; then resumed his listless attitude by the fire, into the heart of which he stared with his blank, unwavering eyes.

Nial had grown tired, as a collie will tire if the kye drowse, chewing the cud.

He had wandered far from the airidh, and passed idly through the pines. No more of him might have been seen that day had he not heard Oona singing in the woods. It was in vain that he tried to come upon her. Either she had caught sight of him, and wilfully evaded his quest of her; or she was like a birdeen lured by the dancing sunrays. At the

last, he thought of a song she was wont to sing. Across the midst of the high glade where he was, lay the bole of a half-fallen pine. Along this he clambered, till he reached the end boughs, and so out upon a feathery branch which swayed up and down with his weight, as a fir-spray when a cushat alights on it:

"Wild fawn, wild fawn,
Hast seen the Green Lady?
The merles are singing,
The ferns are springing,
The little leaves whisper from dusk to dawn—
Green Lady! Green Lady!
The little leaves whisper from dusk to dawn—
Wild fawn, wild fawn!"

It was a harsh and wild music, that song of Oona on the lips of Nial. Brokenly, too, it came, between gasps of breath, for, as the branch swayed, so the dwarf's excitement grew, and he seized the pine-needles as though they were the mane of a horse, and he were riding from death for life:

"Wild fawn, wild fawn,
Hast seen the Green Lady?
The bird in the nest,
And the child at the breast,
They open wide eyes as she comes down the dawn—
The bonnie Green Lady,
Bird and child make a whisper of music at dawn—
Wild fawn, wild fawn!"

Suddenly he ceased his fierce ride of the branches. Surely that clear call was from the throat of Oona? Yes, near she was, though invisible. Her song bubbled from her as sun-lit water down a brae:

"Wild fawn, wild fawn,
Dost thou flee the Green Lady?
Her wild flowers will race thee,
Her sunbeams will chase thee,
Her laughter is singing aloud in the dawn—
O the Green Lady
With yellow flowers strewing the ways of the dawn,
Wild fawn, wild fawn!"

Even the hawk-keen eye of Nial failed to discover Oona. Her voice came from a covert of bracken, amid which rose craggy mossed boulders. Doubtless, the girl sheltered behind one of these.

"Oona!"

He lay still now, save for the quivering of his eagerness. The branch was bent by his weight, but did not sway.

"Oona!"

The rapid skiff-skiff of a hind leaping through the fern, through the green-glooms to his right, caught his attention; otherwise he must have seen the bending of the bracken in the hollow beyond him, and have

heard the faint rustle as a little cat-like figure swung herself up into a low-branched rowan.

"Oona! Oona!"

Again he sang in his strange, half-screaming, falsetto voice, first one, then another of the snatches of Gaelic song which he had learned from Oona, but without response. One of his sudden fits of anger seized him, and he bit savagely at the supporting branch. Then, with a peal of mirthless laughter, he began to sway wildly to and fro again, so that it was a wonder the bough did not break. He was swung this way and that, as an apple on an outspread branch. With short, incoherent cries he rode onward through the air, for the moment persuaded by his fantasy that he was one of those wind-demons of whom he had heard Murdo the shepherd speak—pale elves of the air who race across forest and moor on flying leaves and broken branches, or are swept screaming in the wake of the wind as, with outblown mane and fierce snorting and neighing, "the gray stallion" speeds with mile-long leaps.

A frenzy of insensate wrath shook him, so that he nearly lost his grip. Screaming, he hurled toward Oona the curses that seemed to him most dreadful and mysterious, dark

anathemas of old-time learned here and there during his far-wanderings.

"Droch cheann ort, Oona! Droch bhàs ort! Och, ochan, bas dunach ort! Gu ma h-olc dhuit!—Gu ma h-olc dhuit!" [1]

A faint shuddering cry came from somewhere close at hand. In a moment his madness went from him. The dumb animal soul felt the finger of God touch it. All wrath ceased, and a great pity came, and longing, and sorrow. The tears sprang to his eyes, and he lay on the branch sobbing convulsively, so that he was like to fall.

He raised his head at last, and looked eagerly about him. *"Oona!"*

Still there was no response. His gaze lanced hither and thither like a swallow. If a bee crawled from a foxglove bell, he noted it: if a spider swung on a glistening thread, he saw her as, spinning, she sank. If a woodlark stirred, he saw the shadow of its wing flit from frond to frond. But of Oona, no trace.

"Oona, my fairy! Oona, my fawn! I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! The words were in my throat. I couldn't help it. Not a word was true. Oh, my grief, my grief!

[1] "Bad end to you! Bad death to you! Ay, and may a death of woe be on you! Evil to you, evil to you!"

Oona mùirnean, Oona mo mùirnean—Ochone, ochone, thràisg mo chridhe—darling, darling, oh, 'tis my heart that is parched!"

But the child was obdurate. She made no sign. Nial lay moaning on the branch. The silence was unbroken, save by the sea-like whisper of the wind among the leaves.

Suddenly a cushat crooned. Then the low croodling sound palpitated upon the warm sunlit air that flooded in among the pine-boughs.

The dwarf listened. The gloom in his eyes lifted. He knew how Oona loved his one utterance that was his own, which he had made in imitation of the crooning of a dove. Raising his head, he half mumbled, half sang:

> "*Oona, Oona, mo ghràidh,*
> *Oona, Oona, mo ghràidh,*
> *Mùirnean, mùirnean, mùirnean,*
> *Oona, Oona, mo ghràidh!*"

Surely she would respond: ah, yes, that shrill mocking laugh, elfin sweet in his ears! His gaze leaped along the track of the sound, and then at last he espied her, crouching low in the fork of a rowan, with her bare legs hidden by the bole and only the sparkle of her eyes glinting from behind the screen of leaves.

"Ah," he cried joyously, "I see you, Oona,

my dove! Ah, my little white dove, your little black dove sees you!"

Oona drew herself up, leaped to a lower branch, and sprang to the ground.

"Cha'n ann de mo chuideachd thù, cha'n ann de mo chuideachd thù, ars an colman," she cried mockingly: "You are not of my flock, not of my flock, said the dove!"[1]

And with that she spread out her yellow hair with her hands, and went dancing and leaping through the bracken. Onward she flickered like a sunbeam, till she came to a rocky declivity, where she stopped abruptly, and stared intently into the hollow beyond her.

Turning, she looked to see if Nial were watching her, and when she saw that he was still on the swaying pine-branch, she cried eagerly:

"Look, Nial! Look!"

"What is it?" he cried, nearly toppling from the bough in his eagerness. "What is it, Oona? What is it?"

"It must be your soul, Nial! It's black and wriggling about, in case you catch it! *Bi calamh! Bi calamh!* Be quick, be quick!"

[1] A pretty and common onomatopœic saying, which I remember first hearing as a lullaby, when I was a child of three or four.

Then, with a spring, she leaped out of sight. Nial stared after her for a moment, caught his breath spasmodically, crawled swiftly back to the tree, half clambered, half fell to the ground, and then ran like a leaping goat toward the place where Oona had disappeared.

When he reached the ridge of rock which overhung the hollow he stopped, trembling like a reed in a wind-eddy. At last! At last! Was he to find his soul at last? Black or white, fair to see or uncouth as himself, what did it matter, if only his long quest were now to be rewarded?

Shaking as in an ague, he crawled forward on his belly, till his shaggy head projected over the ledge. At first he could not see, for the passion in his heart had filmed his eyes.

Then at last he stared down into the greenness. He could see nothing. Not a wild bee fumbled among the moss, not an ant crawled along a spray of grass.

What did it mean?

Was it possible that Oona could see what he could not? Here, perhaps, was his tragic sorrow: that his soul might often be nigh, but was invisible to him.

With a hoarse exclamation, half scream, half call, he cried to Oona to come to him. He had a name for her which he had adopted

from Murdo the shepherd, and by this he called her now. "Bonnie-wee-lass, bonnie-wee-lass, come to me! Oona, mùirnean, Oona-mo-ghràidh, come to your poor Nial! Oh, my soul, my soul, it will be lost! Oona, it will be lost! Quick, quick, bonnie-wee-lass!"

But no answer came. There was no sign of the girl. She might be hiding near, or be already far away, perhaps croodlin' back to the doves in the middle of the forest, or chasing dragonflies by the tarn, or out upon the hillside flitting from rock to rock like a butterfly, or singing and springing from gale-tuft to heather-tussock, as a green lintie in the sunlight. "O lassie, lassie, where is my soul, where is my soul?" he cried, despairingly.

Suddenly his own curses came back to him, terrible on Oona's unwitting lips.

"*Gu ma h-olc dhuit, Nial! Gu ma h-olc dhuit!* A bad end to you too, Nial-without-a-soul, and I'll be telling my father, I will, that you laid your curse on me: ay, and I will also be telling Sorcha too, and Murdo, and Alan, and the dogs; and I'll whisper it to the wind, so that it'll tell the Green Lady of the Hills; and if I meet your soul I'll tell it, so that it may be ashamed of you, and go and drown itself in a peat-hole.

Nial listened, quivering. His eyes strained as a crouching hound's.

At last he spoke.

"I was mad, Oona. Forgive me. I see your voice coming from behind that rock. Will you not return and show me my soul?"

"Look in the hollow of the stone beneath you, silly Nial!" came the child's voice mockingly.

Nial stared; then, descrying nothing, leaped into the hollow. The next moment he recoiled with a look of horror.

An adder lay in a little ferny crevice at the base of the rock. Its writhing black body was trying to get out of sight, but could not. An adder was the one thing in nature that the outcast could not bear to look at. It gave him a horror, that at times moved him to frenzy, at times made him flee as a man accursed.

Now he stood as one fascinated. If the *nàthair* had wriggled toward him he would have stood motionless.

With a heavy swaying motion of his head he muttered:

"Anam nathrach,
Anam nathrach!" [1]

[1] "Serpent-soul, serpent-soul!"

Pronounce àn' ŭm nàa-rach. *Nathrach* is the genitive of *nathair* (pronounced *nha*'er, or a'*er* nasally).

But when the adder saw a crevice elsewhere, that promised better, and swiftly wriggled to it, Nial saw that it was only a crawling beast, this and nothing more.

With a dart like a hawk he seized it by the tail, swung it round his head while he shouted, "*Droch spadadh ort! Droch spadadh ort! Bad death to you! Bad death to you!*" and flung it against the face of the rock, so that when it fell across a bracken it lay as though stunned or dead.

A shout of elfish laughter came from Oona, who had sprung from her covert, and watched Nial's discomfiture with malicious glee. He turned slowly. His corrugated brows were knitted grotesquely, as with dull bewildered eyes he stared in the direction of the laughter. With a furtive motion he kept shifting his weight now to one foot, now to another, occasionally dragging one backward as though pawing the ground. His tormentor knew well these signs of perplexity, and her light tantalizing glee rippled afresh across the glade. She stood knee-deep in bracken, with her right hand clasping the black-and-silver bough of a birk: a golden-green hue upon her from beneath from the sunlit fern; upon her from above a flood of yellow sunshine, so that she stood out like a human flower, a new daffodil of the woods.

The wild, rude, misshapen creature who fronted her seemed less human now than his wont, with that bovine stare, that uncouth guise, his over-large and heavy head slowly swaying, his restless stamping and scraping. Suddenly it dawned upon him that Oona had not been in earnest: that she had played with, and now mocked him. His eyes grew red, as those of wild swine do of a sudden, or as those of an angry badger. A spray of froth blew from his hanging lip. His long horny fingers opened and closed like sheathing and unsheathing claws.

The next moment there stirred in his brain the thought that perhaps, after all, Oona was mocking him because he had lost, perhaps even because he, he himself, had destroyed his long-sought and moment-agone found soul.

With a cry he threw himself on the ground, sobbing convulsively. He lay there like a stricken beast, a quivering ungainly heap. It was no unknowing beast, though, that moaned, over and over, *"My soul—my soul—my soul!"* Great tears, like a stag's, ran down his furrowed cheeks. Oona stood amazed. Here was no frenzy of blind rage such as she had seen at times in her companion; but passionate grief: sobs, tears.

The child shivered. God surely has the tendrils of a child's heart close-clinging to his own. Perhaps the wind murmured to her, *My grief! my grief!* Perhaps the leaves whispered, *Sorrow, O sorrow!* Perhaps the blind earth breathed, *My gloom!. my gloom!* Perhaps the laughing sunlight sighed, or the wild bees crooned, or the doves moaned, *Peace! peace! peace!* Oona's eyes grew dim. A trembling was upon her, like that of a bird in the hollow of the hand. Like a bird, too, was her heart: sure, the flutter of it was an eddy of joy in heaven.

She came toward Nial with swift, noiseless step. He did not hear her approach; or if his wildwood ear caught a rustle, he did not look up. The first he knew of her was the stealing of a small arm round his neck: then the pressure of a warm body against his side: then a wisp of fragrant yellow hair tangled with his coarse, shaggy fell, a soft cheek laid against his, a hand like a little white hovering bird caressed his face. Sweetest of all, the whisper that stole into his dark brain as moonlight: *"Nial, darling Nial!"*

His sobs ceased. Only his breath came quick and hard. His whole body panted, quivered still.

"Forgive me, Nial! dear, good Nial! I did

not mean to hurt you so. I was angry because of your words. But I—I—didn't really mean that *that* was your soul. Nial, Nial, I didn't see your soul at all!"

Slowly he lifted his wet inflamed face: his eyes agleam through the tangled locks that fell over his brows.

"Have you *ever* seen it, Oona?"

He could just hear the whispered *No.* A deep sigh passed her ears, and she pressed closer to his sorrow.

"Oona, my fawn, do you think you'll ever see it? Do you think I'll find it some day?"

"Oh, yes, Nial! Yes—yes—yes!"

"And you will help your poor ugly Nial to —to—find it?"

"Sure, it is helping you I will be, with all my heart, Nial-a-ghràidh."

He stooped his head over hers, lightly shoved her back, and kissed her sunshine-hair. She raised an arm and pulled his face to hers, and kissed him gently.

A faint smile, a glimmer of sunlight on a wet, dishevelled road, came over his face.

Oona sat back, relieved, but with questioning eyes.

"Are you *sure* you have no soul, Nial? Not even a small dark one that will grow

some day, and be beautiful, just as *you* will, when—when—you die?"

"I am sure, birdeen. Ask Màm-Gorm, ask Sorcha, or Alan, or Murdo, or any of the people down yonder. They know. And *I* know, when I look in the tarn, or in the pool below the Linn o' Mairg, or in smooth water anywhere: ay, and when the deer come to me, or the sheep do not stir out of my way, or the kye come close and breathe on me kindly. No bee will sting me, and the dragonflies, that even *you* can't catch, rest sometimes, as the moths do, on my head or arm."

Oona kneeled, and bade the dwarf do likewise. Then she told him that his evil might be because of a *rosad* upon him, the spell of the Cailliach: and that she knew a *sian* might ease him. With closed eyes and clasped hands she repeated slowly:

"*An ainm an Athar, a Mhic,*
'S an Spioraid Naoimhl
Paidir a h'aon,
Paidir a dha,
Paidir a tri,
Paidir a ceithir,
Paidir a coig,
Paidir a sea,
Paidir a seachd;
'S neart nan seachd padirean a' sgaoileadh do
Gholair air na clachan glas ud thall!"

" In the name of the Father,
The Son,
And the Holy Ghost:
By one prayer,
By two prayers,
By three prayers,
By four prayers,
By five prayers,
By six prayers,
By seven prayers;
And may the strength of the seven prayers
Cast out the ill that is in you
Upon the grey stones over there!" [1]

Long and earnestly she watched to see if the incantation would effect the miracle. Nial trembled, with downcast eyes.

" Perhaps there is no evil in you, Nial," she whispered; " so now I will pray to Himself for you, and you repeat what I say, and shut your eyes and clasp your hands just as I do."

The soulless man and the child knelt side by side among the fern. The light lay all about them as a benediction. The rising wind, with a wet sough in it, came along the pines like an intoning anthem. Around them the bee hummed unwitting; in a tree beyond them a cushat crooned and crooned.

Oona's voice came low and sweet as the hidden dove's:

[1] *Paidir* is literally a *Pater: i. e.*, a *Paternoster*, "Our Father."

"*O Father,*
That is the Father of the father of Sorcha and me,
I pray that you will give Nial a soul."

Silence. Then a hoarse, sobbing voice:

"I pray that you will give Nial a soul!"

Then Oona again: and, again, Nial:

"*I pray that Nial may find his soul soon!*"
"I pray that Nial may find his soul soon!"
"*I pray that it will be a good soul!*"
"I pray that it will be a good soul!"
"*I pray that it may have yellow hair and blue eyes!*"
"I pray that it may have yellow hair and blue eyes!"

"*I pray that father and Sorcha and Alan and Murdo,*
And that Donn and Fionn, the collies, and the kye,
And the sheep, and—and—everything—
Will love Nial!"
"That everything will love Nial!"

"*And that Nial will go to Heaven too!*"
"And that Nial will go to Heaven too!"

"*And this is the prayer of Oona,*
The daughter of Torcall Cameron
Who lives at Màm-Gorm on Iolair,
An ainm an Athar, a Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh!"
"An ainm an Athar, a Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh!"

Oona opened her eyes, looked earnestly at Nial, leant forward and kissed him.

"Now, Nial, rise, and turn sunways, and cry *Deasiul.*"

The dwarf did as she bade: then, with a happy laugh, she slipped her hand in his.

"Let us go back now. The rain is coming."

And so, as the glooms of storm came rapidly over the mountain, the two moved, silent and happy, through the sighing glades of the forest.

Lowering skies, with the floating odour of coming rain, already dulled the hill-land. A raven, flying athwart Iolair, looked larger than its wont. Its occasional croak fell heavily as though from ledge to ledge of weighty air. The wood-doves which flew back toward the forest winged their way at a lower level than usual, the clamour of their pinions beating the atmosphere as with oars: on the moorland the lapwings rose and fell incessantly with wailing cries. The scattered kye lowed uneasily, or stood below solitary rowans or wild-guins, easing their fly-tormented flanks with their swishing tails. On the farther slopes, the querulous lambs bleated: everywhere the incessant calling of the ewes made a mournful rumour. The wind moved with a heavy lift, here rising, here falling, anon whirling upon

itself, so that all the fern and undergrowth in the corries bent one way, or, for a league, the spires of the heather whitened.

High and low, the innumerous hum of insects vibrated on the air. Thus may the hum of the wheeling world be heard of Keithoir, who dreams in the hollow of a green hill unknown of man: or of the ancient goddess Orchil, who, blind and dumb, works in silence at the heart of Earth at her loom Change, with the thridding shuttles Life and Death: or of Manannan, who sleeps under the green wave, hearing only the sigh of the past, the moan of the passing, the rune of what is to come.

Before Oona and Nial drew close to the hill farm, a shrill sustained cry, not unlike that of the bird called the oyster catcher, came along the slopes. Oona knew at once it was Sorcha's summons for her to help with the cows. With a whispered word to her comrade she sped away by a sheep-path that wound over against Maol-Gorm. Nial slowly advanced to the green hillock of Cnoc-na-shee. He had just flung himself wearily on the grassy slope, when he saw Torcall Cameron stoop and issue from his low doorway.

Màm-Gorm faced the way of the wind, sniffed the air with sensitive nostrils, and let

his blind eyes feel the balm of the damp. Then he turned, and returned to his seat by the fire. Nial watched for an hour. The wind had a steady sough in it, and the clouds were lower, darker, more voluminously vast and swift when Cameron came forth again.

It was this time that he had his staff in his hand, though no cap covered his tangled iron-grey hair.

Nial hoped he was right in believing that Màm-Gorm had come out merely to breathe the caller air: for the dwarf feared the reproach of Sorcha if he let the blind man wander along the perilous moorland, with wind and rain moving like ravenous hounds adown the heights.

When, however, he realised that Torcall Cameron was bent upon making his way to some distant spot, he had not the courage to check him, or even to make known his presence. There was a thundercloud on the man's face, one that to Nial was far more sombre and terrifying than any overhead. When, with slow, hesitating steps, the blind man passed close to Cnoc-na-shee, he stopped for a few moments. Doubtless he was listening to the wind going through the pines, with a noise as of the flowing tide against shingly beaches:

or, perhaps, to the scattered lowing and bleating of his sheep and cows. But Nial feared that, in some strange way, he had perceived him. He trembled, for he knew that "the father" was in one of his dark moods. Deep down in his heart he dreaded the gaze of those sightless eyes more than anything else in the world: in his heart of hearts he was convinced that they saw, more awfully and searchingly because through a veil.

In his anxiety not to betray his presence, he ground his foot firmer into a heathy hollow, for he had slightly slipped when Cameron stopped. A pebble was dislodged, and made a slight noise.

The blind man lifted his head, startled.

"Is any one there?"

No answer. The wind sighed along the grass.

"Oona, are you there? Nial, is that you?"

Silence, but for a faint wind-rustle in the bracken.

"*Sst! Down, Luath, Fior!*"

But no collie barked or whined in response.

"Well, peace to your soul, and go hence."

But at last Torcall was convinced he was alone, for he heard the note of a yellow-hammer, as it fed its mate, close by. With a sigh he moved on. As he passed within a few

yards of Nial, the dwarf heard him muttering disconnected phrases: "Ochan-achone, tha m' anam brùite am chom!" . . . "ma tha sin an dàn!" . . . "ma shìneas Dia mo làithean!"[1]

He waited till Cameron was some way ahead. Then with light step, stealthy movement, and furtive sidelong glances, he followed.

The first thin rain slanted along the wind. The blind man paid no heed. Indeed, he now walked swiftly and firmly along a sheep-path, as though he were familiar with the way, or had altogether forgotten his infirmity.

Out upon a bleak stretch of moor on one of the higher slopes of Maol-Donn stood a cairn. It was here, so rumour went, though none knew for sure, that Torcall's wife, Marsail, lay buried. It was known that she had perished in a snowstorm, and that he had insisted on her burial where she was found: but when the minister and the people came for her body they were told that she was already in the mools, and that even now the stones of her cairn were upon her.

Beside it was a tall flat slab of rock. It may have been part of a Pictish or Druidic

[1] "Alas, my soul is oppressed within me!" . . . "if it be ordained!" . . . "if God prolong my days!"

temple, or its resemblance to a sacred stone may have been accidental. It stood erect, one-third imbedded in the hillside.

To these Torcall Cameron now made his way. At the cairn he did not stop, neither did he drop a stone or even a pebble upon it. When he reached the great rock, he leaned against it, and with folded arms stared sightlessly across the strath to Tornideon, whose vast bulk rose sombre in the deepening gloom.

The wail of the wind momently increased. The rocks sweated, even where there was no rain falling.

Suddenly, over the high crest to the west, the Druim-nan-Damh or Ridge of the Stags, there came a heavy rolling sound as though a mass of boulders had fallen down the far side of Iolair.

This first muttering of the thunder aroused the dreamer. He started, checked some exclamation, and then, having stooped and groped till he found what he wanted, threw a small stone on Marsail's cairn.

Nial drew closer. A flash of lightning had frightened him. Thunder and lightning were to him as direct agents of a vengeful and irate Power as they were to the priests and prophets of old.

The first loud crash filled the air. Then en-

sued a splitting and rending as of a granite mountain, from whose depths vomited a prolonged howling and roaring as of monstrous beasts. The outcast crawled alongside the tall slab against which the man leaned, and gripped a corner with his hand.

When, his white face glimmering in the mirk, he looked up at Màm-Gorm, he shivered with a new dread.

The blind man stood erect, with arms upraised and hands outspread. His face was lit as though a fire burned in his brain. Nial imagined that the dead eyes gleamed, as he had seen toadstools gleam in a dark cave: a dull phosphorescent light, horrible to look upon.

Again a wuthering roar, followed by a scythelike whirlwind, with the sound of rain-torrents flooding the high corries and washing the windward precipices of Ben Iolair. Nial was about to speak, when he crouched back at the volley of words shouted savagely over his head:

"Oh, my Lord God, strike! Oh, let Death be upon me! Sorrow Thou hast given me, and I have not rebelled: grief Thou hast made my daily portion, and I have not rebuked Thee: but now that Thou hast made my day into a charnel-house and my bed into a grave, now

that Thou hast brought before my blind eyes what no eyes may see and live, now that Thou hast set the Dead as a watch upon the living—I cry to Thee, Enough!"

Nial shivered with awe and terror. He saw that a frenzy was upon the man whom he both loved and feared.

There was silence for many seconds. A greenish streak of flame shot across the mountain, intolerably vivid. A sound as of mirthless laughter was drowned in an avalanche-roar overhead. Out of the tumult, later, came wild fragments of human shouting:

"Let there be a duel between us then . . . ay, Marsail, you may weep; ay, Fergus, you may leap out of your shroud to be soul to soul with me . . . what do I care for the hounds of the night? . . . Call off thy hounds, O Hunter! . . . Be the day between us, and the night, O God; and the two noons, and the darkness of the coming and the darkness of the going; and the blood of the living, and the corruption of the dead; and the earth and the sea; and the stars beneath the world, and the stars above the world; and the friend of man that is Time, and Thy friend that is Eternity . . . for I *will* not, I *will* not, I *will* not . . . no, though I perish for ever and for ever" . . . (*and at last, with a scream*) . . . "Go

Thy ways, O God. . . . Leave me, if Thou wilt not slay! . . . I *will* not! I *will* not! I *will* not!"

When the next flash and thunderblast had hurtled and gone, Nial thought that Death had indeed come. Then he heard a low whisper:

"What is it that I hear? Do the dead stir? Marsail . . . Marsail . . . or . . . or . . . is it *you,* Fergus, son of Fergus, son of Ian?"

Sick with fear, Nial sprang to his feet, seized one of the fallen hands in his own, and tried to lead Màm-Gorm away.

The blind man shook as a tuft of canna in a wind-eddy; white, too, as the canna, was his face.

His lips moved convulsively. At last, hoarse, choking, sobbing sounds came forth, and from these grew three or four words:

"Is—it—*you,* Marsail?"

Nial shrank appalled, but could not withdraw his hands.

"Is—it—*you,* Fergus Gilchrist?"

Struggling to escape, he merely added to the paralysing awe which held his captor.

"Who are you—what are you? Are you the thing of the grave, the black guide I have heard of?"

With a sudden jerk the dwarf freed him-

self. The next moment he bounded aside, then, without a glance behind him, fled.

Cameron sprang forward, but when he found that he had missed his grip he drew up again, and stood listening intently. If it was a spirit, it made a noise of running like a human: if it was a creature of the grave, it hurried back to no hollow near by: if it was Black Donald himself, Sir Diabhol had fled, affrighted!

Ah, the Cailliach! He had not thought of *her!* It might well be that the demon-woman had tried to snare him. If so, what, who, had saved him?

Dazed and sick he stood for a moment, because of a crash of a thunderbolt against a near height. The granite splintered like glass. In his mouth his palate shrank: his nerves strained, quivering.

Who, what, hurled that thunderbolt? Was it God? Was He answering his wild prayer?

If it were of God, why had it not stricken him? Hark! A scream far off! Had the leaping Cailliach been slain by the lightning, as a flying man by the spear of his pursuer? Had God given him these things as signs? These voices, that awful touch as of human hands?

He bowed his head. Tears scalded the

burning lids of his blind eyes. Suddenly he sank to his knees, and with outstretched arms repeated an ancient rune of his fathers, the Cry to Age, the Rann-an-h' Aoise:

O thou that on the hills and wastes of Night art Shepherd,
Whose folds are flameless moons and icy planets,
Whose darkling way is gloomed with ancient sorrows:
Whose breath lies white as snow upon the olden,
Whose sigh it is that furrows breasts grown milkless,
Whose weariness is in the loins of man
And is the barren stillness of the woman:
O thou whom all would 'scape and all must meet,
Thou that the Shadow art of Youth-Eternal,
The gloom that is the hush'd air of the Grave,
The sigh that is between last parted love,
The light for aye withdrawing from weary eyes,
The tide from stricken hearts for ever ebbing!
O thou, the Elder Brother whom none loveth,
Whom all men hail with reverence or mocking,
Who broodeth on the peaks of herbless summits,
Yet dreamest in the eyes of babes and children:
Thou, Shadow of the Heart, the Brain, the Life,
Who art that dusk *What is* that is already *Has been*,
To thee this rune of the-fathers-to-the-sons,
And of the sons to the sons, and mothers to new mothers—
To thee who art *Aois*,
To thee who art *Agel*

Breathe thy frosty breath upon my hair, for I am weary;

Lay thy frozen hand upon my bones that they
support not,
Put thy chill upon the blood that it sustain not,
Place the crown of thy fulfilling on my forehead,
Throw the silence of thy spirit on my spirit,
Lay the balm and benediction of thy mercy
On the brain-throb and the heart-pulse and the life-
spring—
For thy child that bows his head is weary,
For thy child that bows his head is weary.
I the shadow am that seeks the Darkness.
Age, that hath the face of Night unstarr'd and
moonless,
Age that doth extinguish star and planet,
Moon and sun and all the fiery worlds,
Give me now thy darkness and thy silence!

It was there, lying with his face in the wet heather, that Sorcha found her father. She had seen Nial flying as for his life, and, from behind the boulder where she was sheltering a lamb, had sprung forward to stop him. But all the elf-man saw was a woman's figure—perhaps the Cailliach who had already stolen his soul and now wanted his body in this night of storm! With a scream he turned aside and dashed onward in his wild, ungainly flight.

Sorcha's great eyes filled with amazement, then with dread. What did it mean? Her bosom heaved, the swell of the sudden tide at her heart. More beautiful than any Fairy-

Woman that ever herded the deer or sang a fatal song, she stood with one hand at her breast, the colour ebbing from her face, her slim firm body poised as an intent stag.

Slowly her gaze travelled back the way Nial had come. In the gloom of storm she could descry nothing, no one. If the Cailliach were there, she was now invisible.

Again an almost intolerably vivid flash of blue-green light, out of a dazzling flame that seemed to burst from the hills. The hollow roar and crash that followed dazed her, but in that moment's illumination she had seen the cairn and the stannin' stane, and, beside them, the figure of her father, apparently stricken and fallen prone.

Without a thought of fear, either of the storm or the evil spirit that might be roaming the hillside, she half ran, half clambered upward till she came upon her father lying low. In a moment she was by his side, and had lifted his head, drying his face with her dress, and kissing him, with a crooning as of a mother over her child.

He was not dead. For that she was thankful. She could feel the throb of his heart, and in his throat there was a sound as of sobbing breath.

"Father, father," she cried; then, whisper-

ing in his ear, "Father of me, father of me, oh, dear to my heart, all is well! I am Sorcha! There is no evil thing here. Come home! Come home!"

She felt the shiver that went over him. Then he sought with his hand, and clasped that which went to meet it.

"What is it, Sorcha? Where am I?"

"Ah, father, dear father, you are well now: arise: I will lead you home!"

"Home?"

"Yes; do you not hear the wind and the rain? *Ah—h—!*"

Again a bursting roar overhead, and the whole of Iolair a beacon of flame whereon every boulder and crag stood out clear as in brilliant moonlight.

"I remember! I remember!" Cameron cried, as he staggered to his feet. "Was it *you,* Sorcha, who took my hands a little ago, when—when—I was speaking to—to—Marsail? . . ."

The girl recoiled in horror. Marsail . . . her long-dead mother!

"What is this thing that you say, O Torcall MacDiarmid?" she whispered, awe-struck.

"It is nothing. I was dreaming. Sorcha, I came here dreaming of past days. Your

mother lies below the cairn there. I was talking to her to ease my pain. I thought she might hear. And while I spoke, I felt hands clasp mine, and try to pull me down—below the cairn, it may be! And then I fell into a horror, and the darkness came over my mind. And, suddenly, I knew that God spared me, though I had cursed Him, and I fell on my knees and cried the rune of Age, that is a rune of old, forgotten among our people, and therewith I was heard, and my strength knew the Breath, and I fell as you found me."

"But, father, father, you are not in the dark way—you are not old, for all the grey of your hair—you are not going to die, and leave your Sorcha and Oona?"

"Would you have me live, *nic-chridhe?*"

Seldom did he speak to her thus, though often he called Oona his heart's dearie and other loving names. The tears came to her eyes.

"Yes, yes, father! I would have you live. I love you."

"My age is come upon me. I am weary."

"Not yet: not yet!"

"Do you not know the wisdom of old—*s'mairg a dh'iarradh an aoise, Woe to him that desireth extreme old age!*"

"Come with me, dear! Come! The rain is

leaping at us. Come! You are cold and wet and shivering!"

And so, at last, silent and weary, Torcall Cameron toiled back against the tempest, and neither he nor Sorcha saw, as they passed the byre, a squat, misshapen figure crouching beside Odhar, the calving cow.

It was a night for the peat-glow. Outside, the darkness was intense. The thunderstorm had rolled heavily away, though the far hills still held an echo. But a great wind had arisen, and blew across the heights with a sound like the trumpets of a mighty host. From the forest came a vast tumultuous sigh, as of the moaning sea.

In the low room, where there was no light save that of the peat-fire, upon which flamed some dry pine-logs, Torcall Cameron sat brooding in the ingle. Opposite to him was Sorcha on a milking-stool, now stirring the porridge in the pot at one side of the fire, now with clasped hands staring into the flames, dreaming of Alan, or of what she had that gloaming heard from her father and from Nial.

At dark she had gone to the byre, and, having found the dwarf, had soothed and entreated him, so that his dark mood passed,

and he followed her, in furtive silence, into the room, where, unknowing of his advent, Màm-Gorm sat.

Only once had the blind man spoken since he had seated himself once again before the peats. It was to ask Sorcha if she thought that the person who took his hands by the cairn could have been Nial. An imploring glance from the outcast made her refrain from betrayal of his presence: of which she was glad when, having replied that she was certain it was he, for she had seen him running down the hillside as though terrified by the lightning, her father broke into a muttered savage curse.

At last Màm-Gorm slept. The fireglow calmed the wrought face. The tangled iron-grey hair fell over his forehead. He looked strangely old; could it be, thought Sorcha, that his prayer had been heard, and that already the Shepherd had found this weary sheep? And yet, so strong was he, so tall and strong; strong as an aged pine on a headland! Surely his ill was of the stricken heart only?

When his breathing came soft and even, she rose, lightly kissed his grey hair, with a tear for the pity of the old that is in the loving heart of the young, and then went out to the byre to see if Odhar was warm, and under

no spell nor evil, though her calf was not yet due.

As she went out Oona slipped in. She was dry and flushed, for at the coming of the storm she had crept into the hayloft, and had there been lulled to sleep by the rush of the rain and the endless rising and falling sough of the wind. Nial made a sign of silence, so she came forward soundlessly. For a time she stared intently at the sleeper, then, seeing that Nial, who had crawled to her side, would not look at her but sat blinking at the flame, she began to croon a song.

The sweet Gaelic words fell from her lips like soft rain in a wood. The room was filled with a low chime of music. Old strange chants or fugitive songs, one after the other, came fragmentarily to her lips; and the plaintive air of them was sometimes her own, sometimes what she had heard others sing, and once or twice old-world melodies, more ancient than the oldest pine-trees, older even than the "fallen stones" in the place on the south slope of Iolair called Teampull-nan-Anait, where a thousand years ago none passed who could tell who Anait was, or where her altar had been or who were her worshippers.

Once the door opened. Sorcha glanced

through the flame-lit dusk: a smile on her face, sweet as the dream in her beautiful eyes. The father asleep; Oona crooning before the peats; Nial, quiet hound of Oona, with dark eyes staring up at her from where he lay on the floor: she need not fear to leave, and go out to the roofed hay-room, where Alan's arms yearned for her, where his heart beat for her, where his lips were warm in the dark, where the dear whisper of his voice was the echo of the white song that clapped its hands rejoicing in the sunbower in the hollow of her heart.

IV

But, from that day, the gloom lay more heavily on Torcall Cameron even than of yore. Oona herself could hardly win speech from him. During the week of fine weather that followed the thunderstorm she was rarely at Màm-Gorm. The forest held her with its spell, though often she was on the heights with Murdo when he led the kye to the hill-pastures at sunrise, or with Sorcha at the milking of the cows at sundown.

During the noons, she sought—alone or with Nial—that white merle of which Sorcha had told her once, which had haunted her

waking and sleeping dreams ever since. Whoever heard its song would be in fairyland for a thousand years, though the joy of that would be no more than a year and a day of mortal time. Whoever saw it might follow its flight, and for the seer of the white merle there would open wonder after wonder. The green spirits of the trees would come forth, chanting low their murmurous rhyme: the souls of the flowers would steal hand-in-hand, from leaf-covert to leaf-covert, or dance in the golden light of the sunbeams; the singing of the birds, the crooning of the cushats, the hum of the wild-bee and the wood-wasp, the voices of all living things from the low bleat of the fawn to the singing stir of the gnats by the pool or in the hollows—all would become clear as human speech, and would be sweet to hear.

Long, long ago, that white merle had flown out of Eden. Its song has been in the world ever since, though few there are who hear it, knowing it for what it is, and none who has seen the flash of its white wings through the green-gloom of the living wood—the sun-splashed, rain-drenched, mist-girt, storm-beat wood of human life.

But Oona watched for the white shimmer, for the magic song. She looked everywhere

save where the white merle nested—in the fair soul of her; listened everywhere save where its secret song was—in the music of her young life in heart and brain. Ah, the sweet song of it!

As for Nial, he crouched for hours at a time, lest by noon or dusk he might hear or see the magic bird. If only he could catch but a glimpse of the white merle, sure he would see his lost soul somewhere among the green spirits who, Oona said, would be seen coming out of the trees which were their bodies. Neither did *he* know that there was one place where it rested often on a spray in its singing flight, a fugitive Hope; or that notes of its unreachable song pierced the gloom of his bitter pain.

Sorcha alone, only Sorcha, started at times as though she heard it: and in her dreams, and in the dreams of Alan, it sang, a white wonder on a golden bough, in the moonlight.

But for Torcall Cameron in his sorrow there was no white merle. Oona asked him once what its first notes were like.

"*Bron! bron! mo bron!*" he answered; "mo bron, mo bron, ochone, arone! Doilghios orm'sa, tha mo chridhe briste!" [1]

[1] "Grief, my grief! O grief, my grief, ochone, arone! Sorrow upon me, my heart is broken!"

Almost every afternoon he went out alone upon the heights, though never again by the cairn where Marsail lay. Sometimes he would sit on a boulder, brooding dark; at times Sorcha or Oona would descry him kneeling in the heather, often with fierce gestures, as he prayed wild prayers—fragments of which the wind sometimes bore to the listener, who no more durst approach.

Ever since that day by the cairn Nial had kept out of his way. Not without reason; for once, as the dwarf lay sleeping in the noon-heat, under the shadow of a rock, he was suddenly seized in an iron grip.

It was in vain for him to struggle. What he saw in the face of his captor gave him the courage of desperation.

"Let me go, Màm-Gorm!" he muttered in a voice hoarse with passion. "Let me go. I am Nial of the woods."

"Ay, Nial of the woods! Spawn of the Evil One! Think you I don't know you to be the child of the Cailliach? You talk of your lost soul, poor fool! Your *lost* soul, you that never had and never will have a soul!"

"Let me go, Màm-Gorm!"

"Let you go! and where will I be letting

you go to, you that are no man, but only an elfish creature of the woods? Was it *you* that came out of the grave that day—that day by the cairn?"

"And what will you do, Màm-Gorm?"

"What will I do? What will I do? By the blood on my soul, I will drive a stake through your body, so that no more shall you haunt the living!"

"Let me go, Torcall Cameron, in the name of God!"

The blind man relaxed his grip a little, which had become like a vice. The words brought a shock to his heart. He had never heard Nial call him by his name before: and if he were of demon birth, how could he say "an ainm an Athar"?

"Let me go, Torcall Cameron, or I will put a *rosad* upon you, a spell that no *sian* of Oona or Sorcha will save you from."

"*You,* you thing of the woods, *you* put a spell upon *me:* you who had my bread, and had my fire, and who would have died but for me! Ay, and you would put a spell upon me! And what would that *rosad* be like, now, from you that have never consorted with men, and have learned nothing save from the lassie Oona?"

"When I was with the children of the

wind," Nial began, to be interrupted at once by his captor, who muttered, "Ah, the gypsies I forgot"—and grew grave, as with the shadow of a fear.

"When I was with the children of the wind, Màm-Gorm, I learned some things that even you may not know. And in the woods I have learned that which no man knows. And if I put the evil upon you, you will die slow, year by year, from the brain that is behind your eyes to the last bones of your feet!"

Cameron shuddered.

"It may be so. God forgive me, any way. You have done me no harm. But look you, Nial of the woods, keep out of my way when I wander abroad—and let me hear no more of your spells. There: you are free to go. Yet even now that my hand is off you, I long to make sure that you are not the thing that came out of the cairn."

With a dark, vengeful face the elf-man moved out of reach; then he whispered in a slow, meaning way:

"I am going, for I see Marsail coming down the hill from the cairn, and with her is a man——"

"A man! A man!" shouted Cameron, trembling as in an ague. "Who is the man?

What is he like? Give me your hand, Nial, give me your hand, for the love of God!"

"He is tall and fair, and dripping wet, with his hair lank about his head, with the water in it."

Ah, he had his revenge now! Màm-Gorm gave a low moan, and sank to his knees. There he cowered, muttering incoherently.

"Nial," he whispered hoarsely at last, "Nial, Nial, do they come this way—Marsail and—and—the man who is dripping wet?"

The dwarf raised his head and stared about him. He was tempted to make his late tormentor suffer; but the brute heart of the soulless man was melted because of the agony of one of the lords of life.

"I see no one now, Màm-Gorm."

"No one—*no one?*"

"No."

"Are you sure, Nial?"

"I am sure."

"Give me your hand."

"You will do me no hurt?"

"On my soul!"

Nial slowly advanced, took the outstretched hand in his, and helped the trembling man to rise.

"Nial, tell me this thing. Have you seen these—these—these *two* before this?"

"I have never seen the woman."

"Then how do you know it was Marsail, who is dead years and years and years agone?"

"Is it forgetting you are that when I was a child I saw her body, on the day of the snow?"

There was a pause, wherein the questioner brooded darkly. At last, in a low strained voice, he asked:

"Have you ever seen the man?"

"No."

"Do you know who he was?"

"No."

"Can you guess who he was?"

Silence.

"Speak, Nial!"

Silence.

"Speak, Nial, whom I have fathered."

"He was dripping wet, as though—as though——"

"Well?"

"*As though he had fallen into the Linn o' Mairg.*"

A savage spasm came into Cameron's face. The nails of his fingers drew blood in the prisoned hand, which was snatched away as Nial again moved out of reach.

"I will lay my curse upon you, you evil beast!" Cameron shouted hoarsely—"Dhonas's a dholas ort!—Bas dunach ort!—Ay, ay, Nial the Soulless, son of the demon-woman, God against thee and in thy face, drowning on sea and burning on land, a stake of the whitethorn between thy heart and the pit of thy belly!"[1]

Of the few curses he knew, none seemed to Nial so terrible, so mysterious, so straight upon life out of Death, as that conveyed by the two words, "Marbh'asg ort!"

He waited till the fury of the man was spent. Then, frowning darkly, with his red, bloodshot eyes agleam, he muttered, "*Marbh'asg ort!* . . . Your death-wrappings be about you!" So low was his voice that it fell unheeded.

Cameron turned his sightless eyes upon him. Nial shivered. The blindness of his king hurt him as a searing pain.

[1] "*Dhonas's a dholas ort*"—"*Bas dunach ort*": *i.e.* "Evil and sorrow to you. . . . A death of woe be yours! God against thee," etc.: this dreadful and dreaded anathema runs in the Gaelic—"Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodann, bathadh air muir is losgadh air tir, crogan sgithhich eadar do chridhe 's t' airnean": from which it will be seen, by those who know Gaelic, that I have not translated literally either "crogan" or "airnean."

"What was the thing you said, Nial of the brutes?"

With a great effort, the bitter word was slain ere it was spoken. The voice that came from that wild, fantastic, woodland thing, with its shaggy peaked head, its faun-like ears, its rude, misshapen body, was ever harsh as a branch grating in the wind; but now it was gentle. Tears that were unshed softened it. The grief of the pariah was its benediction.

"Màm-Gorm, my father, the thing I said was a bitter thing out of Nial the herd, but this thing that I say to you is by poor Nial of the brutes, and that is *God preserve you . . . ay, gu'n gleidheadh Dia thu, Torcall-mo-maighstir!*"

And with that the brute turned from the man who had cursed him, and with slow steps and bent head made his way across the hill-side, till he entered the forest, whence he came not for three days, and where none, not even Oona, saw him.

It may be that he had heard at last the song of the white merle.

V

So the weeks went till the coming of the season that, because of the heats and of the drought, is called the month of the hanging of the dog's mouth.[1]

Great heat, with many thunders, had prevailed. For nine days at the beginning of July the rain poured: or ceased, only to let rainbows come and go upon the gleaming hills. During this time Oona and the blind man at Màm-Gorm were much together. A change had come upon the child. She looked at her foster-father often, with a wistful gaze. Something puzzled her. In the air, some vague trouble moved like a vanishing shadow. Of Nial she saw little. Now and again she heard his signal in the forest, and answered it: sometimes, at dawn or dusk, coming upon him on the hillside, sitting solitary on some isolated boulder, or crouching by a pool, and staring intently into its depths. But he would not come across the airidh. No one knew how he lived. Once or twice Murdo the shepherd gave him to eat: and, every morning and night, Oona put a small

[1] *Mios crochaidh nan con.* This month is the period from the middle of July till the middle of August.

crock of porridge and oatcakes, or other food, in a place where the vagrant could have it if he willed—and thrice, at least, she found it empty. On the few moonlit nights she fancied she saw a pale, misty column of thin smoke rise above the pines.

Still more was she troubled about Sorcha. Her beautiful sister had grown even lovelier to look upon, but there was a new look in her eyes, a new hush in her voice. She shepherded on the mountain as one in a trance: as one in a dream she moved about the house. At night, in her sleep, she sighed often, and moaned gently: and once, turning and finding Oona by her, she put her arms round the child, and, sleeping still, whispered, *"Ah, heart of my heart, joy of my joy!"*

Oona knew that Sorcha and Alan Gilchrist loved each other. She knew, also, that this was why Alan could never come to Màm-Gorm, for her foster-father had laid his ban upon their love. But what did this love mean? What, she pondered vaguely, did this tragic silence, this tragic yet happy silence hide? "I know now," she said one day to Sorcha at the coming home of the kye, "I know now why it is that Alan, when he meets you in the gloaming by the byre or

in the hay-shed, or down in the strath by the Mairg Water, calls you 'Dream.'"

Sorcha was startled, and the beautiful face flushed at the knowledge that she had been seen at these secret meetings with Alan. Oona's unconsciousness of any cause of embarrassment, however, reassured her.

"So you have seen us, Oona my flower? Well, see to it that you say nothing of this to father, or to any one. And, Oona, my bonnie, how do you know he—Alan—calls me 'Dream': and what do you mean by saying you know now what that means?"

"I heard him call you so, that moonlight night last week, when you came hand in hand through the wood. He called you Sunshine, Joy, and then Dream—and you said that 'Dream' was best, for it was the name he gave you '*that* day.' . . . Sorcha!"

"Yes, birdeen?"

"What was '*that* day'?"

The girl turned her face aside, because of the flame in it; but the flush was in the white neck as well, and the child laughed.

"Ah, it was when he first kissed you!"

"Yes, dear," Sorcha answered, flushing again; "yes, it must have been then."

"Sorcha, tell me, do you love him very much?"

"Yes. More than I can tell you, my sunbeam. When you are a woman you will understand."

"When I am a woman I am going to marry Nial."

"Nial!"

"Yes. No one will love him, because he has no soul; but *I* love him, and will marry him. Half of my soul will then be his."

"Is that so, then? Sure 'tis a south wind for Nial! And where will you live, Oona-my-heart?"

"The White Merle will show us the way."

"Ah, I see, it is a fairy tale. Well . . . Oona, I will tell you a secret. *I* have heard the song of the White Merle!"

The child's eyes grew big with wonder and excitement.

"When? Where? Was it where the old yews are in the Upper Strath?"

"It was now here and now there."

"But when, when?"

"Whenever Alan called me 'Dream,' and the other names, I heard the song of the White Merle."

"Ah, it is you that I envy! Sorcha, do you think that if Nial called me beautiful names I should hear it, too?"

"I fear not, dearie . . . *not yet.* Perhaps

—perhaps if *you* called *Nial* those beautiful names *he* would hear the song."

"Then I will."

"No, not yet, Bonnikin. You will only harm Nial. But now run away. Father will be seeking you."

"Ah, and who will be seeking *you?*" cried Oona, as she danced away, laughing. "Ah, 'tis a good name, *Dream;* for you are always dreaming in your eyes now, Sorcha!"

Yet day by day thereafter the child laughed less blithely. There was a shadow about her foster-father. It held her spellbound. Never had she been so long away from the woods before, never before had she been so long indoors. She was glad to be with the blind man, and to take his hand when he went out to stride sometimes for miles along the rough ways of the hills. She talked much to him about the White Merle, and the "guid-folk," and the quiet people; sometimes of Nial, and of the strange things he saw and heard, and how the birds and beasts would come to him, and how he harmed none, nor they him. Sometimes she asked about the Cailliach, or about the wind-spirits; or strange questions about the people of the Strath, glimpses of whom she had occasionally, and for whom,

particularly for the black-garbed minister, she did not conceal her contempt and dislike. Sometimes she sang; and that was what the blind man liked best. Once only she spoke of Alan: how she thought that Christ must be like him, so fair to see was he; how she loved his low voice, and soft touch, and grave, sweet eyes.

But she saw at once that no good would come out of any mention of that name. Her foster-father grew moodily taciturn; and when, after a long silence, he spoke, it was to ask her in a harsh voice if she had ever broken his command, and climbed the opposite slopes of Tornideon.

"Never, father."

"And have you ever sought the woman Anabal, that is mother of Alan?"

"No."

He seemed satisfied, and asked nothing further. But as for Oona, she brooded over this more and more, and wondered more and more because of the ban upon Alan, and because of the feud between Torcall Cameron in his loneliness on Iolair and Anabal Gilchrist in her loneliness on Tornideon.

The first day of August came with settled weather, and almost tropic heat.

All that day Torcall Cameron had been strangely restless. If Oona left him for more than a few moments, he grew impatient, and then angry. Again and again she begged him to come into the green shadowy woods, or even to climb to the Ridge of the Stags on Iolair; but he would not. At last, weary with the heat and the long blank hours, weary too with Oona's importunities, and not wholly unwilling to humour her for his own sake, he let her take his hand and lead him forth at her will.

Sorcha alone knew that, for some reason which she never fathomed, her father's "black day" was this first day of August. Year after year, his "dubhachas," his gloom, came upon him with that dawn, so that he would have word with none. She knew, too, that when the dark day was gone, her father was better for weeks thereafter, and sometimes smiled and laughed like other men.

The night before had been an ill passing of July. Murdo, the shepherd, had come in, his face white. As he had come down the mountain he had heard a wild and beautiful singing, and had descried a herd of deer being driven with the wind, keeping close together. He had not seen the demon-woman, for he had turned his head away, and mut-

tered a *sian* to keep the evil of her from coming about him like a snake. But he thought the wind brought some of the words of her song to him, and they were of death and the grave. Then, muttering "*Glacar iad's na innleachdan a dhealbh iad*"—"Let them be taken in the devices they have imagined"—he had fled. Later, Oona came with a strange story from Nial. He had been crossing the highland behind Màm-Gorm, and had seen two men and two women walking silently with bowed heads. One man was tall and dripping wet, as though he had come out of water, and his lank hair hung adown his face. The other man was Màm-Gorm himself. The faces of the others he could not see, but one woman was tall and gaunt, with wild, straggling grey hair—a woman like Anabal Gilchrist on Tornideon. He heard only one word spoken, and that was when Màm-Gorm stopped, looked at the house, and said, "*C'aite am bheil an cilidriom?*" [1]

"What is an *cilidriom,* Sorcha?" Oona had added. To which her sister had replied

[1] "Where is the hearse?" *Eilidriom* (pronounced like *ā-ee-drēm*, is used in Skye and the isles, rarely if ever on the mainland. *Snaoimh* (bier) is the common word, though when a hearse is actually meant, it is alluded to as the *carbad-mhàrbh*, "the death-chariot."

that she did not know, and that she was to say nothing of this in the house.

"And what then, Oona?"

Nial, the child resumed, had heard no more. But when he turned and looked toward the strath he saw nine men moving away from Màm-Gorm, carrying in their midst a long black box. When he glanced back, the four wayfarers he had seen had disappeared.

Yet, as Sorcha knew, her father had not stirred from the house that day. Nothing of what Murdo or Nial had seen came to his ears—of that she was heedful. But suddenly, while they were eating the porridge, Oona asked her foster-father what an "eilidriom" was.

Cameron sprang to his feet, pale as death, and shaking, with the milk that he had spilt from the mug in his hand running down his breast as though his life-blood were pouring from him, white, too, with fear.

"*What is that you say, Oona?*" he cried, hoarsely; "what is that you say? *Do you see a carbad-mhàrbh—at the door—coming here?*"

"No—no——" murmured the child, terrified.

"Then how do you know that word for it? Who told it to you? I have not heard it

said for years. No man uses it in this country. I have not heard it since—since Marsail died—and then it was from—from the people yonder on Tornideon, for Anabal Gilchrist was of the isles."

But here Sorcha had interposed, and said that Oona had picked it up in some way—in one of the old runes told her by Murdo, no doubt.

For the rest of that night Torcall Cameron only once opened his lips, and that not at the covering of the peats, or when Sorcha sang one of the sweet *orain sprioradail* he loved so well, after she had read a while in the Book of Peace. It was when she came to him after he had lain down in his bed, and kissed him, and let her flooding tears fall warm upon his blind, upstaring eyes: then he pulled her head closer, and whispered, "Sorcha, Sorcha, my soul swims in mist!"

It was a night of beauty, and still. All slept. But toward dawn a voice arose in the corries. From height to height it went, and the long wail of it swept past the green airidh of Màm-Gorm and wandered sobbing through the forest. Then all was still again. The dawn that came soon after was of pale gold and faintest wild-rose. Peace was in the heaven.

But with that sudden passing wail, so often heard on the mountains when there is not a cloud in the sky, and when far and near not a branch sways, and the gnats dance in long columns perpendicularly without drifting this way or that—with that voice out of the hills, Torcall awoke.

When Sorcha arose she heard him moaning. Wearily she wondered what this fateful date meant, this dreaded first day of the eighth month. When she went to him, he said no other word than this: "I have heard the lamentable cry of death."

"The cry of death?" she repeated, questioningly.

"Ay, truly, the lamentation of the demon-women mourning for the dead."

So it was that all that day Torcall Cameron had been as a man in an ill-dream, weary of the long hours, yet dreading the passing of them into the shadow. So, too, it was that, at the last, he went forth with Oona.

At first they wandered into the forest, but here Torcall was never at ease, and so after a time they strolled hand in hand from glade to glade, till the sound of Mairg Water came soothing-cool through the heat.

The peace and utter quietude lay as balm upon the weary man. He grew drowsy at last, as his trouble seemed to lift from him. More than once he would have stopped, and thrown himself on the ground, content to stir no further, but Oona urged him to come on to where the river ran through shelving ledges with a singing sound, and nothing else was to be heard but the whisper of the silver birches and the thin, green reeds.

The crooning of the cushats was in his ears. Sweet it was to have that soft touch of sound after the lamentable cry of the hills, that morning cry now dulled, so that it was there only as a shadow in a darkened room.

He was glad when the breath of the water came upon his face, and he could sit down among the bracken and fragrant gale, and do no more than listen idly to the passage of the water. The whispering water, the scarce audible susurrus of faintly stirred leaves overhead, the singing of the gnats, the low incessant croon of the cushats, these were all the sounds to hear. Not a breath of wind moved in the pinewood, so that it gave not even that vast, slow suspiration which may be heard in forests once or twice between sunrise and sundown even on stillest days. All the birds were still, though few sang even at day-

break in that season of the young brood. Over the reaches of the water the swallows skimmed, hawking silently.

An hour passed. Thinking that he slept, and weary of sitting still so long, Oona rose and slipped away. At first she went to a great yew that towered near the fringe of the forest, to see if the wood-doves she had heard crooning there had fallen asleep, for now they no longer made their croodling moan. Then, having espied them, sitting close with fluffed plumage and drooping wings as they drowsed in the warm shadow, she peered here and there for the nest of a shrew-mouse, for often she had heard thereabouts the patter of the wild-mice in days of drought.

Her quest led her on and on. A sudden splash made her look at the narrow river. A grilse had leaped half out of the clear amber-brown water, and missed the dragon-fly which had been poising its arrow-flight close to a wreath of circling foam. The tumult of the linn, a score of yards beyond her, was pleasant in her ears. She forgot the shrew-mice, and thought only of the great salmon that Nial declared slept or lay waiting night and day under a ledge at the bottom of the linn. Yes; she would steal across the rocks, and creep in among the boulders, and

lie along the lowest ledge that sloped to the seething hollow, whose black depths, and the deafening noise of whose tumult, had ever an irresistible fascination for her.

She seemed like a water-sprite herself, as she stood on a high rock at a place where the ledges sloped sheer into a crevice, at the bottom of which a snake of brown water writhed through holes and crannies till it leaped out into a back eddy of the river whence it came. She had plucked a branch of rowan-berries, some still green or ruddy brown, but others already kissed into flame by the sun. This she waved slowly to and fro before her, partly to keep the midges away, partly because the rhythm of the running water was flowing through her brain, and so along all the nerves of her body. The sunflood beat full upon her. Her short, ragged, scanty dress glowed like a chestnut-husk in the sunlight; in the hot yellow sunshine the tanned skin of her legs and feet gleamed ivory white. With parted lips and shining eyes she stood intent, transfigured.

Suddenly she started. A look of curiosity, of astonishment, came into her eyes.

What, she wondered, was that unfamiliar object lying in a ferny hollow of the rocks which formed the bridge of Mairg Water,

whence the stream fell in a rushing cataract into the Linn? A human figure, clearly; a woman, too. Who could she be? Was she alive or dead? Was it Sorcha? No. Could it be one of the fairy-women of whom she had heard so often: the Cailliach, of whom she had been told so many tales; or that green-clad, yellow-scarfed, mysterious Bandruidh, the sorceress who won the souls out of grown men, and whose glance was fateful as a kelpie's? A kelpie's! Ah, was this indeed not the kelpie of the Linn o' Mairg, lying there in wait for her! or might it be in truth the kelpie, yet only asleep there in the great heat? If so, now was the time to espy it, and perhaps steal or find a hair of its head—which, wound about the third finger of her left hand, would make her a princess among the secret people, and enable her to know what no one in the whole strath, or the greater strath of the world beyond, would know, to see what no one would see.

These were the thoughts which passed through her mind, while her blue eyes gazed unwaveringly at the woman, dead or asleep.

At last, slowly, and with careful heed, she drew nearer and nearer. When still many yards away she recognised the sleeper, whose deep, regular breathing reassured her. It

was Anabal Gilchrist, the mother of Alan, the woman banned to her and Sorcha by their father as though she were accursed. True to her word, Oona had never been at Ardoch-beag, the widow Anabal's farm, but several times she had caught a glimpse of the solitary woman, and now knew her at the first glance. Once, more than two years back, she had been luring trout one evening in the Mairg Water near Ardoch ford; and had been startled by the sudden appearance of a woman, who had seized her in her arms and kissed her over and over, sobbing convulsively the while. The woman had drawn her plaid over her head, and what with this, and the dusk, and her fear, Oona had not time to discover who it was. Later, she was convinced that it was no other than the mother of Alan.

When she saw her now before her she stood hesitatingly. She felt drawn to this sad-faced woman who had once snatched her in the dusk and covered her face with kisses; but she was still more attracted by the mystery which enveloped her.

It was only a quarrel, Sorcha had told her; and often she had heard her sister say that if only her father and Anabal would meet, all might be explained. In a flash an idea

came into the child's mind. The thought sent the blood leaping from her heart. Her eyes shone.

Two motives impelled Oona. Neither was of itself, but one was interwrought with the other. The love of mischief, with her innate audacity and fearlessness, urged her to place her foster-father in the last place in the world where he would fain be; but, also, something in her heart pleaded for the quiet bringing together, in that hushed and beautiful sun-going, of these two bitter haters.

Yes, she would do it, though she knew that her foster-father's wrath might fall heavily upon her. If—if only Sorcha—no, she did not care, she would do it. After all, no harm would come of it. She would watch, and if the woman rose and went away, she would come back and take her foster-father's hand and lead him home again.

Though the woman slept, overcome with weariness, why was it that a trouble of deep sorrow still lay upon her face, as the trouble of waters, even after the sea-wind has died into the blue calm of the air? The tears were still wet upon the hand that lay across her breast; why had they fallen? The child stood a while brooding. What did it mean? Slowly she glanced about her. No one was

visible. It was clear that by the way the woman lay she had not fallen.

At that moment Oona noticed that Torcall had slipped a little, because of the slope whereon he had lain. Drowsily he was feeling about him for an easier rest.

Like a hare, as swift and as soundlessly, she made her way to him.

"Rise, father," she whispered; "come further up the stream; it is pleasanter there."

For nights Torcall Cameron had had little or no sleep.

Weary with these long, long hours; weary with his fasting and his restless idleness; weary with the windless heat; and, above all, weary of his own thoughts and of himself, he resigned himself gladly into Oona's hands.

Even as he walked he swayed. Sleep was so heavy upon him that the roar of the waters of the Linn came to him no loudlier than as the muffled song and humming rhythm of the stream itself.

Gently, with her heart beating the while, the child led the blind man to the place where the woman Anabal, after long weeping, had fallen into deep slumber. He lay down like a child. The noise of the rushing waters lulled him, the ancientest, sweetest cradle-

song in all the wide green world. If he heard at all the breathing of the sleeping woman, no other thought could have come to him than that it was Oona.

She stared down at them with awestruck eyes. What was this unthinkable terror that shook her like a leaf? For a moment she conquered her fear, a fear so vague, and of the soul only, that she did not know she was afraid, though the nerves in her body leaped to the breath of it.

The tears came into her eyes. Yellow was the light that fell upon the tangled iron-grey hair of the weary sleeper at her feet; yellow as yellow flowers was the gleam upon the brown-grey tresses of the weary sleeper by his side.

The hand of the woman moved. Out of the sunglow the arm crept like a snake, then it lay still in the shadow betwixt the two who slumbered unheeding.

Oona knew not why she did it, nor even what she did; but with a touch, light almost as the warm sunbeam itself, she guided the hand of Anabal toward that of Torcall. As two ships draw together on a calm sea though far apart, so the hands of these two, who had not spoken one with the other for weary years, slipped at last side by

side. The man stirred a moment, smiled, and gently clasped the hand in his.

Then, when all was well, Oona shivered with actual dread. What if they should die so? What if they were already dead? Once more she fought back this terrifying emotion. How quiet they seemed! Sweet is the grey sleep of the old.

"*Tha iad rèidha nis,*" she sighed rather than whispered; "they are at peace now."

But now no longer could she stay. Like a fawn, after she had crept back upon the grassy ledges, she leaped from boulder to boulder. Soon she was at the verge of the forest. Inexplicable fear drove her like a whip. Minute after minute passed, and still she fled as though pursued. Nearly a mile had she gone before she stopped, only to fling herself into the bracken in a sheltered place, a kind of cave formed by the gigantic roots of a fallen pine-tree, long years ago wrenched away like a reed and stricken to the ground. There, sobbing at she knew not what, she cried herself to sleep at last. When the dark came, her slumber was unbroken. A solitary moonbeam that made its way through the dense covert to where she slept lay upon her feet, upon her slow-moving breast, upon the white flower of her face, upon the out-

spread tangle of her hair, which it clothed with fugitive pale gold. No vision of ill disturbed her. Once only she stirred, as, in dreamland, she thought she heard the song of the White Merle.

VI

When the gloaming fell upon the Linn o' Mairg, Anabal stirred. The churr of a fern-owl echoed in her ear, and dimly she awoke to the knowledge that it was late. But where was she? She had dreamed a pleasant dream. Hand in hand—even now, she thought—hand in hand even now were she and Fergus—Fergus so long dead, and never come again to put his lips against the pain in her heart.

After all, was it a dream? Or, rather, was not all that weary past a dream? She would not open her eyes. She would press the hand that clasped hers, then she would know.

Ah, the joy and the pain of it! It was Fergus indeed! She had moved her hand and pressed his, and the pressure had been returned—faintly and slowly, as though in sleep, yet still returned! But where was she?

That noise of waters all about her, that ceaseless surge and splash, the smell of the rushing water, the cool spray upon her face: was this not indeed the Linn o' Mairg, where, late that afternoon, she had fallen asleep?

Now at last it was clear. Yes, she was at the Linn o' Mairg. But the time of her mourning was over, and her evil was no more anywhere in the blue sky or in the green earth, for Fergus had come to her.

In this hour of death, she must tell him all. She would not open her eyes yet awhile. She of the living might not be able to look on *that* of the dead. And first, moreover, she must speak.

"*Fergus!*"

No sound came from the sleeper by her side. She imagined that his hand quivered, but she did not know for sure.

"*Fergus!*"

Ah! now he was awake from his death-sleep, for she heard his breath come quick and hard. The hand she held in hers shuddered as with palsy.

"Ah, cold hand of my heart!" she murmured, raising it, chafing it the while, and putting it to her lips at last.

"Ah, cold hand out of the grave! Often have I felt it at my heart! Fergus, dear to

me, Fergus, Fergus! Ah, one word to me, one word to me!"

Still no whisper from the man beside her. She could hear the shuddering breath of him.

"Fergus, I must speak! If the dead know aught, lang syne you must have known I knew nothing of the evil deed done upon you. But oh, my man, my man, I had loved Torcall before I loved *you!* Fergus, listen! Do not draw away from me! Do not rise! Fergus, Fergus, I *must* tell you all!"

"*Speak!*"

Awe came upon her as a sudden darkness at noon. The dead had spoken. The life in her body tore at the gateway of the heart. The voice was human, hoarse and low as it was. Almost she had courage. Once more that low, hoarse mandate came. The sound shuddered through the dark upon her ear.

"*Speak!*"

"Be not too hard upon me, Fergus! I loved him, though not as he loved me. I never forgave him because that in his anger he married Marsail. But when I was to marry you, whom I loved as I had never loved him——"

Here the sobbing woman stopped a moment, because of the fierce grip upon her hand, then, panting, resumed.

". . . Then, as God knows my soul, I put him out of my heart. But the wild beast in him arose and rent him. He went to and fro mad because of his lust of me. Then the day came when, in my weakness and loneliness, he had his will of me. For days after that I did not see him. Then the spell of the sin fell upon me, and it was sweet—sweet for a brief while was that evil and accursed dream! Then it was that you came back from the fishing among the isles, to this place where your father lived, and where I was because of the mother that bore me, and is long dead, God be praised! And when you married me, Fergus, the child that is Oona was already within me, God shaping that burden there underneath my heart, till every pulse beat heavy with it! And now you know the thing that has eaten at my life all these weary years."

No sound, save the constrained sobbing breath of him who listened.

"*Look!*" he whispered at last.

Slowly Anabal opened her eyes. In the misty dusk she could see the white sheen of the flying water, but not the face of her beloved. The dark figure was there, clothed as in life. Taller he seemed, and broader; but sure, Fergus—sure, Fergus. Who but he,

with those eyes of love and longing burning upon her out of the night!

"*Anabal!*"

O God, the agony of it! The voice was even as the voice of Torcall, the man who had sown her womb with the seed of sin, and had reaped blindness and sorrow all the years of his life. Bitter the mockery of this thing.

"Fergus! Fergus! Heart o' me, husband!"

"*Anabal!*"

With a scream she sprang to her feet. She swayed as one drunken. The man saw it, though he was blind.

"Back! Back! Back!" she cried, groping blankly with outstretched arms. "Back, if you be a phantom out o' hell! Back, if you be the Fiend himself! Back, Fergus, back, if dead ye be, and are here but to mock me. Back! Back! Back! Torcall Cameron! Back, man, back! I am grey, grey, withered, grey and old. . . . *Ah, my God!*"

He had leaped upon her, as a wolf leaps. She was in his grasp, and the strength in her was as melting snow.

"Anabal! God hears me: I dare not lie to you, I who am blind——"

"Torcall Cameron, as God is my witness, I saw your face in his dead eyes."

The man groaned; then, as though weary, spoke once again:

"I have sworn. I have not lied. Fergus slipped and fell, I not touching him nor near him at the time. I tried to catch him as he fell, but the Mairg Water was in spate, and it was useless. He came out at the Kelpie's Pool. He was not quite dead, and I looked into his eyes ere the veils came on."

Still no word, only that dread silence.

"Anabal! Anabal! Let all this misery be at an end. Sorrow has aged us both. But I have loved you ever. I love you now. Woman, woman, you were mine, all of you, all of you, mine to the leaping body, to the beating heart, to the shaking soul—mine —mine—before ever he touched you! Mine you were before ever I put my sin upon you; mine you have been ever since, and ever sh——"

"Torcall!"

"I hear."

"Who brought you hither, this night of all nights?"

"Oona."

No sooner had he spoken the name than a cry escaped his lips, mate of that which burst from hers.

"Go, go! Man, devil, murderer, madman,

go, go!" and, screaming thus, with a fierce struggle, Anabal Gilchrist strove to escape from the grip that held her.

"Anabal! Anabal! At least do not send me to my death! I am blind. Lead me home. Put me hence, and through the wood! I am blind, and the night lives with terrors for me!"

For a moment the woman was about to yield. A long tress of her grey-brown hair fell upon his hand, and he grasped it as a drowning man at a rope. Then she saw, or believed that she saw, a look in his face that maddened her.

"*Never*, so help me God!"

Without a word, he was upon her. He had her in his arms, and was laughing low, horribly, mirthlessly.

"I will never let you go, Anabal! . . . I have waited long. . . . You are mine, and no one else's . . . mine you were, mine you are, mine you'll be till the Last Day and for evermore!"

She felt one arm slacken, and his hand seek hers. Before she realised what he did, he had snatched the wedding-ring from her finger and thrown it into the Linn.

Once more he laughed.

"Anabal! Anabal! . . . Anabal, my joy!

I love you. . . . I love you. . . . I love you. All the youth of my life is upon me again. I am blind, but I see you as on the day when you quickened with new life! Dear, O my dear, heart of me, joy of me! Anabal, listen! I am Torcall! All is forgotten: all the weary years are gone! Sweetheart, this is my heart against your heart! *Ah—h—h!*"

He had seized her, and the flames of his kisses scorched her face. Between his panting, sobbing cries, and her choking breath, he buried his face in her hair, heedless of the grey blight upon that yellow corn; and bruised that quivering body, whose flesh was still so warm, so firm, young long after the breath of age on the hair, in the eyes.

Then she gathered the strength that was in her. With a fierce blow she made him reel, so that he nigh slipped and fell.

"Murderer!"

A blank silence came upon them. Around, the rush of the water: swift-sighing it seethed beyond, with hollow roar and surge in the linn below where they stood. Over the forest lay a faint yellow bloom: the moon shining upon it from behind Ben Iolair. A fern-owl churred its love-cry through the warm, fragrant night. A thin, impalpable mist obscured the few stars that shone, but the splintered

lance-rays of them glistered this faint exhalation of the earth.

When the man spoke, his voice was as though frozen.

"It is a lie."

"No lie is it, Torcall Cameron; for I see the naked truth in your soul."

"It is a lie."

"Where is my man, where is my man Fergus, whom you slew?"

"I slew him not."

"Liar! Liar! Even here, on this very spot, on this very night years agone, he came upon his death at your hand!"

"Listen! I heard *you:* now, hearken to *me*. . . . On that night, but before it was dark, we met, here. It is true. True also that there was fear and hate between us. But as God hears me, as God sees me, as God hath stricken me blind and gloomed the bitter life of me, I did not put his death upon him!"

"Anabal!"

Her breath came hot against his face.

"Anabal!"

No word, no sign. He knew by the passage of her breath that she looked now this way and now that: behind him, beside, beyond.

She saw that they were standing now on

the extreme of the slippery ledge that overhung the seething depths. No longer did she make any attempt to resist him. Death called out of the pool. She made no effort to save either him or herself.

"Anabal!"

Mechanically she moved her arms as though to free herself. She felt his hold slacken.

"Anabal! Do you yield?"

"I yield."

Mechanically, again, she leaned forward and kissed him on the breast. The next moment his foot slipped. He reeled, staggered wildly. Anabal snatched her arm away.

Again he slipped and fell forward. He was now on the very edge of the ledge. His hand fell upon one of her feet. She stooped to push aside his arm. He raised it, caught at something, gave a wild cry, and shot into the dark, with heavy plunge and splash.

In the moonshine—for the yellow bloom had now expanded into a flood of rippling gold—she saw the black mass of his body whirled to and fro. Once the white face was turned to her—a blank disc. Twice, thrice, she saw the black arms move above the seething caldron in a strange, fantastic dance.

Then, in a moment, as from a bolt, the body

was shot into the deep pool beyond the outer fang-like rocks of the Linn.

Anabal Gilchrist turned, the foam on the water not more wan than her white face.

With slow steps she regained the heathy ground. She did not look back once, then, nor as she clomb the long slope to her home.

VII

It was an hour before midnight when Oona awoke. So often had she slept in the woods, through the hot summer nights, that there was nothing strange or terrifying in the blackness of darkness about her. She could smell the pungent odour of the bracken, and, somewhere near, wild mint. The keen fragrance of the pines and firs everywhere prevailed.

Ah, she was in the forest: how warm and sweet it was! Where was Nial? Scarce more than this drifted through her mind; then the heaviness of sleep came upon her again.

The night waned. Dawn broke upon the eastern hills. Slowly the light travelled downward beyond the crests of the mountains. It reached the forest, and spread an unshim-

mering sheen over it, like the silver calm on a green sea. Then, out of the sky a marvellous flower grew. It was a dusky, rosy grey at first, as it lifted through the blue-black heaven, already steel-blue in the east. Green folds of pink uncurled and fell languidly on each side: drooping petals. There was a stir and quiver; then a shaft of gold, another, and another. Suddenly it was as though the heart of the flower burst. In the yellow mist and radiance, wherefrom tall, waving foliage of golden fire moved as though fanned by a wind from within, a cloud of glowing flakes arose. These may have been the wild bees that make the honey of Magh Mell, or the birds of Angus Óg, belovèd youth-god of the yellow hair. Then the golden heart of the miracle swelled, with a mighty suspiration. Petals of rose and gold-green and pale pink as of shells unclosed from it. The vast blue flower was aureoled now with an ascendant glory.

One by one the stars melted into heaven. Low in the south-west a planet seemed to divide, then to close again, in a nebulous gleaming haze. Then this night-bloom slowly paled, dwindled, and sank into a deep gulf. An indescribable fragrance, an almost inaudible rustling sound—faint, as the roar of the rush-

ing world is faint beyond all ears to hear—filled the air. The pulse of the world quickened. The green earth sighed, and was awake.

Through her sleep Oona heard the croodling of doves. Then a bleating fawn in a fern-covert close by made her stir. Suddenly she half-rose, stared about her, and felt the breath of the cool wind that, too, had been awakened by the sun, and was now sighing softly through the pine-glades.

Then in a moment there came upon her the remembrance of what had happened.

With a cry she sprang to her feet. What of her foster-father? Had he awaked in the gloaming and found the woman Anabal beside him? Had he made peace, or was his anger even now brooding terribly? Who had seen him home? What would he say—what would Sorcha say? Perhaps, even, he had fallen into the Linn, or, it might be, he had tried to make his way home alone through the forest, and now lay somewhere in its depths, blind and baffled.

Thus was the child wrought. But what could she do? she wondered. Should she make her way swiftly through the forest and up Wester Iolair to Màm-Gorm, and there see if her foster-father was in his bed and

asleep? What would he say and do? Once she had seen him in a passionate rage, and her heart shook at the remembrance. Perhaps he would kill her. Does it hurt much to be killed? she wondered. Then she thought of Nial. If she could find him, he could discover for her that which she feared to seek herself. Where would he be? For nights past he had not been seen at Màm-Gorm. He might be high upon the mountain, perhaps at Murdo's remote sheiling on Ben Iolair, by Sgòrr Glan. He might be at the cave, Uav-an-teine: the great hollow cavern, dry even in winter weather, which lay but a short way above the Linn o' Mairg.

Yes, that was likeliest. Nial loved the place. There he might sleep where no dew nor rain could touch him, and with the sound of Mairg Water to be his lullaby through the dark. She would seek him there. But first she would go to the Linn, so that she might know that her foster-father no longer lay by the stream-side.

The heart of the birdeen lightened as she walked swiftly through the dewy fern. She began to call back to the cushats and other birds as they uttered their matin cries. Then she laughed, and broke into snatches of song.

The light was streaming down the Strath

as she emerged into the open glade above the Linn. Here, among the trees on the slope and in the many cavernous rocks and bosky hollows, deep shadows still lingered. It would be nigh upon an hour before the morning twilight waned hence.

A glance showed her that there was no one at the Linn. She ran down close to it, and peered eagerly here and there, on either side. There was no one visible. With a sigh of relief she was about to step forward to take a sunrise peep into the Pool below the Linn, for the great salmon she had never yet been able to descry, when she stopped, because of the croaking of a raven.

It was not lucky to go athwart the croaking of a fee-ach' at sunrise. The great black bird swung on an outspread bough of a hazel, close to the Kelpie's Pool, and croaked with harsh, monotonous reiteration. Oona stooped, lifted a stone, and threw it at the raven, who watched her closely.

"Fitheach! fitheach! The way of the sun to you! Be off, be off!"

Croak! croak!

"Black fēē-ach, black fēē-ach, go where the dead are, and do not cross my way, or I will put a *rosad* upon thee!"

Croak! croak! croak!

Half angry, half glad, the child threw another stone; then turned, leaped from stone to stone till she gained the grass again, and then went singing low toward the cave called the Uav-an-teine.

The arch of it was still in shadow, and the bracken on the brow of the arch: though the rowan that leaned forward into the air bathed its upper branches in sunlight. On the smooth thyme-set sward beyond, the yellow shine lay; so warm, that the butterflies hovered in and out of the golden area.

With cautious steps Oona advanced. If Nial were there she wished to surprise him while he slept.

She crawled to one side of the sunswept cave, within which was still a warm dusk. Surely that was the sound of breathing? Yes; she could hear the steady rise and fall, faint though it was. With a smile she moved forward.

Suddenly she stood as one changed into stone. What was this: what did it mean? No sign of Nial was there. But, among dried bracken and dead leaves, blown or drifted there in autumnal days, and forming a place of rest fit for the weariest deer that ever leaped before the baying hounds, lay two figures, clasped in one another's arms.

For a moment the idea flashed across Oona's mind that the sleepers were Torcall and Anabal. Then she knew who they were, for who had such a mass of lovely dark-brown hair as Sorcha? what man of the Strath had the curly yellow hair of Alan? So that was where the lovers met! Once or twice, within these last few cloudless days and nights, she knew that Sorcha, when at length the restless lapwings had ceased their querulous crying in the moonlight, had slipped quietly from the house. She knew, too, that once at least Sorcha did not return till sunrise, for she had been awake, and had risen, and had seen her sister moving slow through the dew, with so wonderful a look in her eyes, so beautiful, so strange, that she had not dared to speak, and had fled back to her bed, with a sob in her throat, she knew not why.

She smiled, and pondered how best to startle them. How she wished Nial were here also, so that he might laugh when Alan and Sorcha suddenly awoke, and found themselves observed!

But, as she looked, the change that had already been at work in her of late, swayed her mood otherwise.

She rose to her feet, and leaned against the

green mossy boulder at the side of the cave. For a while she stood thus, her eyes intent upon the lovers. How beautiful Sorcha's face was, faint-flushed like that! What a new, strange light upon her face! And Alan: how tall and strong he was, how bonnie the rippling gold hair of his head! His fair face, whiter now than she had ever seen it, seemed cut out of stone, so sharp were the outlines. Thus, she thought, must Angus Óg seem: Angus, the fairest youth of the world, whom none sees now, for he is of the Ancient People, who, though still among us, are invisible to mortal eyes. Often had Sorcha told her of him: sure, now, this was he?

Instinctively, she looked to see if white birds hovered anywhere. For the olden tale said that the kisses of Angus Óg became white birds, and that these flew abroad continually, to nest in lovers' hearts till the moment came when, on meeting lips of love, their invisible wings should become kisses again.

No, there were no birds: none, at least, for her eyes to see.

The hot sunlight moved upon her bare feet. Soon it would reach her waist, she knew, if she stood brooding there: and when it did that, the glow would be upon the face of Alan, and he would awake.

A sudden fantasy took her. Almost she had laughed aloud. When she moved into the space opposite the cave it was as though she waded in sunshine. Everywhere in the light the dew shone, filled with unburning fire.

She crossed the sunspace, to where a mass of honeysuckle drooped over a wild brier. With deft fingers she made a crown of this, starred with some pink wild-roses, plucked from a low bush beyond the brier; then of the dusky yellow honeysuckle wove a garland.

Decorated thus, and with sparkling eyes, she turned and faced the cave again. Soundlessly she began to dance.

At first it was the mere joy of her laughing glee. Soon, she hoped Alan or Sorcha would wake. Ah, then, how she would laugh, to see them stare confusedly at her, dancing there in the sunlight!

But as she wavered to and fro in the sun-sea, a dreamy pleasure moved her to half-forgetfulness of where she was. A mavis on the rowan over the cave began to sing, the strange late song that sometimes wells forth in silent August; at first, long, sweet, vibrant notes, then a swift gurgling music, and then, as his heart warmed against the sun, more

and more wildly sweet, till the hot air swung with the intoxication of his rapture.

More and more, too, was Oona rapt as she wavered to and fro. The swift rhythm of her joyous dance wrought her as with a spell. A dream lay in her eyes, now set far away—far away, where Angus Óg was, and where the sun rose and the moon waxed and waned to the singing of the white merle.

The sunlight seemed to drift her onward, as though she were a dancing wave on the forehead of the tide. Soon she was past the cave, and still, as the sunbeams flickered, she leaped and swayed, rapt in an ecstasy beyond thought or heed.

Suddenly, the thrush ceased. There was a whirr of wings: then a sharp, quickly repeated strident cry.

Another second, and Oona was a laughing child again, crouched low in the bracken. Alan or Sorcha was awake, and had stirred!

Ah, no, she thought, she would not let them see her now. True, they might hear her, where she lay panting like a young bird escaped from a hawk! As soundlessly as she could, for her quick breathing and the rustle of the bracken, she half-crawled, half-ran, back the way she had come. Soon she was safe, for the pines enclosed her, and then the

beeches and birks near the water-slope. From behind a vast beech-bole she watched to see if she were pursued, or seen. But no one came. All was as before: only, the thrush did not venture back to the rowan, which now threw its flickering fingerlike shadows on the smooth turf below, in front of the cave.

VIII

Already the breath of the day was windlessly hot.

Flushed with her dancing in the sunlight, and with the languor of August in her blood, Oona listened eagerly to the cool sound of the running of Mairg Water.

The next moment she was free of her scanty raiment, and was by the streamside. As she stood among a cluster of yellow irises, the sunlight lay upon the gold of her hair and the glowing ivory-white of her body, and then seemed to spill in yellow fire among the tall blooms about her feet. A faint green glimmer from the emerald iris-sheaths dusked the small white thighs.

A leap like a fawn, and she was in the water. A hundred miniature rainbows gleamed in the dazzle of spray as she splashed

to and fro, after she had come to the surface some yards downstream. What joy it was to feel the cool brown water laving her body: to dive and swim like an otter: to float slowly with the current under overhanging foliage, and see the young sedge-warblers in the reeds or among the water-willows, or to look up at the curving boughs of a birch or rowan, deep green against the deep blue! Then the wonder and beauty to rest with outspread arms, and breast against the flow: to stare down into the mirroring depth, and see the flickering feathers of the quicken and the red rowan-berries marvellously real and near, with lovely shadow-birds flitting to and fro among the shadow-branches, and, strangest of all, another white Oona drifting like a phantom through that greenshine underworld!

When she swung round suddenly, and held herself back against the downflow, as an otter half-alarmed will do, it was not because she was drifting too near the "race" just above the cataract. A strange sound came from the Linn, or beyond it. The noise of the water was in her ears, and she could not hear distinctly: but surely that noise was the cry of one in sorrow, and, at any rate, human.

With a swift movement she slid to the bank, caught at a tuft of flowering sedge, and then

stood, dripping and all agleam in the sunlight, while with inclined head she listened intently.

Now she could hear more distinctly: certainly some one was by or near the Linn. The noise of the churned waters rose and fell in a long, wavering, unequal sigh; and in one of the downward hushes her keen ears caught tones and even words she fancied she recognised.

She hesitated for a moment as to whether to run back for the handful of clothes she had left upstream, but then bethought her that it was only Nial and no stranger who might throw stones at her as a kelpie—as some boys from the Strath, who at Beltane had been burning small fires and cooking wild-birds' eggs, had done many weeks agone at Nial.[1]

[1] In many parts of the Highlands it is still the wont of children at Beltane (May Day) to light fires in woods or on rocky spurs, and there cook eggs, or play other pranks, sometimes very fantastic ones. These meaningless observances are a survival of the days of Druidic worship. Beltane means the *sacred fire*. *Baal*, *beal*, or *bel* is not the actual Gaelic word for the Sun, or the Sun-god: though the Druids may have had *Baal* from the Phœnician mariners who came to Ireland. The ancient Celtic word is *bea'uil*, "the life of everything," "the source of everything." *Beal* (pron. *bel*) and *teine*, "fire," give "Beltane"—the Festival of the Sun.

How often, in her wanderings with Nial, she had bathed, to his wonder and awe at her white beauty, her daring, her skill! As for him, though he loved the running water almost with a passion, nothing would induce him to enter it, except when alone and in the dim light. As a boy he had been as much at home in it as any creature of the river. But once, after he had come to know Oona, and to find in her the one person in the world whose soul did not loom too infinitely remote above his drear loneliness of spirit, he had leaped one dead-calm noon into the water; and there and then, for the first time, realised, in the phantom which swam with him or beneath him, the misshapen ugliness of his body, the savagery of his distorted head and features. From that day he had never entered the stream, save at late dusk or on moonless nights.

So with swift steps, which left small pads of damp upon the rock-ledges, Oona ran toward the great boulder which overhung the cataract.

As she passed the place where, a few hours ago, she had left her foster-father and the woman Anabal, she glanced here and there for any trace of either she might not have seen before. The next moment she caught sight of Nial.

She watched him curiously. What did it mean? she wondered. He was crouching, with his back to her, on the extreme of the ledge overlooking the Kelpie's Pool—that deep caldron which received all that was at last disgorged from the maelstrom of the Linn. His head was bent forward, and sometimes he leaned on his hands, and sometimes swayed backward or sideways.

What startled her more were the strange, wild, barbaric words that Nial was chanting, with thin, hoarse, monotonous wail. What was this rune he chanted? Why did he crouch there, chanting and swaying, swaying and chanting?

Sometimes he ceased for a few moments that crooning, mourning, appealing, inexplicable chant, and appeared to be speaking, and to gesticulate as he spoke.

Fantastic thoughts flashed through the child's brain. Perhaps it was the kelpie who was trying to lure Nial to her arms; or mayhap Nial had seen her, and was putting a *rosad* upon her. She knew that the people of the Strath, and even Murdo the shepherd—in truth, Alan, too, and perhaps Sorcha, though she would not say it—believed that the elf-man was in league with all the mysterious or dreadful creatures of the shadow, from the

harmless "guidfolk" of the hill-hollow to the yellow-clad demon-woman who drove her herd of deer and sang her death-song, and to the dark and terrible kelpie who lurked in the deep pool in that wild place beyond the Linn o' Mairg. Or, again, Nial might be uttering some incantation: or be at his old quest, the seeking of his lost soul.

Surely it must be that, she thought, as soundlessly she approached him.

Within the last minute or two a change had come over him. Every now and then he raised his head, often clasping and unclasping his hands, swaying to and fro the while, and speaking or chanting rapidly, with wild, scarce coherent words. He was as one in an ecstasy. Oona, for the first time, feared him. She stood, only a few yards behind him now, and listened.

"Ochan, ochone, arone! and so fair too, and so fair!
O white you are as the canna that floats in the breeze,
Or as the wool of the young lamb that Murdo found
dead in the heather,
Or as the breast of Sorcha, or as Oona, little Oona!
O, O, arone, arone, Death of me, Woe!
Oh, white too and fair, and I black as the wet peats,
Black and ugly, so that even the deer know,
And Fior and Donn and all the dogs
Think me no more than a sheep, than the kye, ochan,
ochone!

But oh, it's dead you are and drowned, Anam, my Soul!
And it's there you lie . . . grey and still . . . with . . . and you laugh at me, maybe . . .
And it may be you are the shadow only that will go if I leap at you!
. . . and hair like mine thick with dew . . .
Or . . . the kelpie . . .
And true it was, with the fēē-ach, and the feannag, and the corbie,
The corbie, the hoodie-craw, and the raven!"

At these words Oona glanced swiftly to right and left. Nowhere had she heard again the croaking of the raven, and now she could descry neither of Nial's three birds of omen. But just as her gaze was wandering back to the dwarf, she caught sight of the *fitheach* further downstream, perched upon a dead branch near some rocks, and even as she looked she heard its harsh, savage *croak! croak!*

"*Ay, ay,ròc, Fēē-ach, ròc! Dean rocail, dean rocail!*" began Nial again, with a wild gesture. . . .

"*Nial! Nial!*"

He ceased all movement, all sound, as though smitten into silence. Her fear partially overcome, now that she had gathered from his words that he thought he had found his soul at last, but that it was dead—yet with

a dread in her heart because of the *thing* that lay there in the pool, whether alive, dead, or asleep, or treacherously assuming life—she called again, and more loudly:

"Nial! Nial!"

Slowly he looked round. A bewildered terror in his eyes waned. It was only Oona.

"Nial, Nial-mo-ghràidh, what is it?"

"Hush, mo-mùirnean," he muttered, beckoning to her to creep close to him. The slight breeze that had sprung up for its brief life crept along the stream, and whispered along the grass and in the hot-smelling fern. The murmurous sound of it made the child glance apprehensively behind her. She dreaded the elfin footsteps that folk said could be heard at times near Nial.

"What is it, dear Nial?"

"*Ssh!* Hush! Come here: look! . . . look!" he whispered.

Gently she stole beside him, leaned over the ledge, and stared down into the pool. A mere breath of the breeze ruffled the surface, and all she could see was a dark mass with a dusky white splatch, looming shadowily through the amber water, and strangely distorted by the silver shimmer caused by the wind-eddy, which came and went round the circuit of the pool like a baffled bird.

"What is it? Who is it? What is it, Nial?"

"Hush, do not speak so loud! It is my soul."

"Your soul, Nial?"

"Ay, true. Sure it is my soul. All night I was in the woods, and I heard a *tap-tapping* going ever before me, and at dawn it led me down by the Mairg, and then the spirit flew away before me, and the *annir-choille* was just like a woodpecker! And when it flew up by the Linn, I . . ."

"Whisper louder, Nial! I can't hear."

"When it flew up by the Linn, I saw it change into a curlew, and it wheeled over the Linn and called *cian-cian-cianalas,* and then I was afraid, though the annir-choille that was like a woodpecker had made hope to me of finding my soul."

"Who is the annir-choille, Nial?"

He gloomed at her silently. Then in a constrained voice, and with averted eyes:

"How should I know? I know nothing. I am Nial."

"But what have you been told?"

"They call her the wood-maid—the tree-maid."

"*Ah-h!* . . . and Nial . . ."

"But when I came near, the curlew flew

away. Then it was that I looked into the pool. And then, and then it was, Oona-mo-rùn, that I saw my soul lying here—big as a man's soul should be, and with a face as white as yours; ay, a fair, good body like Alan's, an' with clothes on, too—dark, beautiful clothes; an' the hands of him that moved about were white; an' . . . oh, Oona-birdeen, look *you* now, and see if it is not as I say!"

The awed child stared into the brown depths, where the surface was still ruffled silvery here and there, with a glinting, glancing shimmer that made all things below shiftily uncertain.

"Do you see it, Oona?" cried an eager whisper at her ear.

"Ay, sure."

"Oona, Oona, is it dead? Oona, birdeen, Oona-mo-gràidh, it may—it *may be living!* O Oona, the white soul o' me—white as you, my fawn!"

The blue eyes glanced up from the pool, and at the speaker. She looked at him, then downward again.

"Nial!"

"Yes . . . yes, Oona . . ."

"The wood-maid has been playing with you."

"No, no, no—that is not a true word on your lips!"

"Sure, a true thing it is. Look, Nial; see how big it is. The white face of it is yonder by the salmon-hole, and one foot is moving against the rock below us!"

"And what of that! Sure, it is a beautiful soul, dead or alive; and big as a man's should be, and fair and white and strong!"

"Nial. . . . Nial . . . it may be alive, for I see its hands moving . . . but . . . but"—and here tears came into the child's eyes, and her voice shook with sorrow for her hapless friend—"but . . . oh, Nial . . . so big a soul will never be able to creep into *your* body . . . for you are small, dear, small, and —and . . . an' then *it* is so big and strong!"

Alas, the pity of it! Never once had Nial thought of this; never had he dreamed that so large a soul could not get into his dwarfish, misshapen frame.

He stared in wild amaze, first at Oona, then at the drowned thing in the water—his soul, or a phantom, or a body, or mayhap the kelpie, he knew not which, now—then at Oona again. A fierce pain was in his eyes. He bit his lip, in the way he did whenever Màm-Gorm struck him—a thing that had not been for months past. A little rivulet of blood

trickled into his thin matted beard, tangled and twisted this way and that like a goat's.

"Nial! Nial!" moaned Oona pitifully.

"Ay, it is true . . . that is a true thing that you will be saying, Oona. Sure, it would need to be a soul as small as your own that would do for poor Nial."

"No, no, Nial!" cried the child comfortingly, "bigger than mine, *really, really*—yes, and . . . and . . . fatter!"

A sob shook his heavy frame. Oh, the long seeking, and the near goal, and the bitter futile finding! Still, Oona's sympathy was sweet. Dear birdeen that she was, to say he would have a bigger soul than hers, bigger and fatter too! But, no, he thought—no, better to have one the same as Oona's, for all he was so much older and bigger and stronger than she was.

"Ah, Oona-mùirnean, if I could only find my soul at all—anywhere, anywhere!"

"But you *will* find it, Nial! You *will* find it! Sorcha told me that you are *sure* to find it. Never mind what they say down there in the Strath. What do *they* know about souls? And . . . and . . . Nial!"

"Yes, my birdeen."

"If . . . if . . . you *can't* find your soul anywhere—and all this summer we'll go seek-

ing, seeking, for it, till we have listened at every tree in the forest and on the mountain-side—if you *can't* find it anywhere, *I am going to marry you!*"

Nial looked at the child bewildered. He knew little of what marriage was, save that in the Strath two married people lived in one house, and that the woman was called by the name of her man, and that they were sadder, and led duller lives—so at least it seemed to him. Sure, it would be for pleasure that he and Oona should have a cot of their own, though he, and she too for that, preferred the pinewood; and a thing for laughter that she, the bit birdeen Oona, should be called Bean Nial!

"Why would you be marrying poor Nial, Oona my doo?"

"Because you would then have half my soul. Yes, *yes*, Nial! don't shake your head like that; I *know* you would. Sorcha told me it was in the Book."

For the moment the outcast forgot what lay in the pool. Of three things he stood ever in awe. First, Torcall Cameron, the man of men. Second, the Book, which was a mystery, and held all the *sians* and *rosads*, all the spells and incantations in the world, and, as he had heard, was full of "living words," though

never had he, being soulless, seen any coming or going to it, like bees, where it lay on the shelf above Torcall's bed. Third, the inscrutable powers which worked somewhere, somehow, behind Torcall, before which even he, Màm-Gorm, was, almost incredible though it seemed, as mist before the wind.

When, therefore, he heard Oona speak of the Book, his awe held him for a moment spellbound. Never had he so much as dreamed that his name was even mentioned there at all. The wonder, the mystery of it, almost took his breath away. What an ill thing, then, that word of the preaching-man he had met once in the Strath, who had told him, in answer to his asking, that he, Nial, could have no name in the Book of Life, because he was unbaptised, and a godless heathen, and a soulless elf-man at that! And now—now—Sorcha had seen his name in the Book—ay, and not in any poor, small Strath Bible, but in the great *Bioball* that was Torcall Camcron's own, up at Màm-Gorm, on the hillside of Iolair!

But of that mystery he was to hear no more then and there. A cry had come from Oona, a cry of such terror, with moan upon moan, that his heart within him was as a flame in a windy place.

What had happened to the child? Was there a spell upon her? he wondered; was *that* down there in truth no other than the treacherous, quiet-seeming, murderous kelpie!

He saw that she was shivering all over; that her body was as pallid as her white face.

Not a word came from her. She kneeled forward, staring stonily into the pool.

"Oona! Oona!" he whispered chokingly, terrified beyond further power of speech. Without averting her gaze, she slowly raised an arm and pointed at what had hitherto been but a blurred figure at the bottom of the water. The arm, the pointing hand, remained thus, as though paralysed.

Nial bent over the ledge. The slight breeze had now passed. Not a breath shook the feather-leaf of a rowan. The sunflood poured out of the east upon the shimmering land. Though but an hour after sunrise, the heat palpitated. For the first time that morning there was no wind-eddy upon the pool. The brown water was as lucid as a mirror.

The thing—corpse, or soul, or kelpie—had begun to move. It was slowly rising to the surface.

He shuddered. This, then, was the cause of Oona's fear. Yet, even as this thought passed through his brain, he knew that there

was some other reason for the frozen agony of the child.

The body ascended gradually, face downward, the arms trailing stiffly beneath it. One foot was still caught by the weeds, which had caught it as in a net. With a slow gyration the corpse swung round, face upward. The weed-thrall gave way. The drowned rose with outstretched arms.

Oona shrieked, then sank back, cowering, and covered her eyes with her hands. Nial! Nial neither thought nor felt; he was stunned by a blank, bewildering amaze.

For what he saw, and what Oona had seen, was the drowned body and the dead face of . . . Torcall Cameron!

In the awful, throbbing silence, broken only by the turmoil of the Linn and by the incessant moaning of the child, the dwarf stared as at some horrible impossibility.

It *could* not be! Màm-Gorm, of all men in the world! Màm-Gorm, the great, strong, stern man of the hills! no, no, no—sure, it could not be! Moreover, as he knew, Màm-Gorm never left the hillside; in all the time he had known him, he had never come nigh the Linn o' Mairg, nor even near Mairg Water, and how could he be there? And would not Oona for sure have seen him that

very morning in his own bed belike? Besides . . . *Màm-Gorm* . . . it was as though the preaching-man were to cry out, "*There is no God!*"

At his ear he heard a moaning whisper: "*It is my doing; it is my doing.*"

"Oona, Oona-lassie, is it mad that you will be!"

"O Nial, Nial, Nial! it is of me, this thing! Ay, sure—ay, sure! O arone! arone! it was I who left him sleeping nigh the Linn last night, thinking to make peace between him and the woman Anabal that is Alan's mother! And oh, oh, she has gone away in the gloaming not seeing him, and he will be for going home when he wakes, and will be calling *Oona, Oona, Oona,* and I not be hearing him, for I was away in the wood, with the fear upon me! And then he will be moving through the dark, and—and—O Nial, *Nial!* He is drowned, drowned, and the water is on him because of *me!* Nial! Nial!"

The child swayed to and fro in her passionate grief. A new fear came upon Nial: that she might throw herself into the pool, to be drowned even as her foster-father was.

But at that moment both were hushed into staring silence.

Slowly the corpse began to sink again.

Down, down it went, leaning forward more and more, till it seemed as though it were standing upright on some unseen ledge of rock. Then, gradually, it revolved further, till once more it hung suspended in the depths, face downward, and with stiff arms adroop beneath.

Without further gyration, motionlessly it seemed, the body sank, till it became blurred, obscure, shapeless. Then there was no more of it than a black shadow far down in the brown depths.

Oona rose to her full height. She gave a long sigh, one short, choking sob. Her eyes stared unwaveringly at nothing; the nails of her fingers cut the small clenched hands. The raven on the dead branch beyond the pool, that had been croaking monotonously ever since she had first heard it, became suddenly still.

Nial rose too. He knew, without word from her, without thought even, what she meant to do.

"Oona!"

She did not glance round, but he saw her throat quiver.

"My birdeen, my birdeen, ah, my bonnie wee fawn! Come back, come back! Sure, it is not him at all! It is the kelpie, Oona, it is

the kelpie!" When the words came from her, hushed and strange, he knew that she knew the truth.

"I will be going . . . now."

"Oona! come . . ."—then in a flash his arms were about her as she leaped, and with an effort that nearly hurled both into the pool he swung her back to the ledge.

There she lay on the grass-covered rock, white and still. Nial bent over her, moaning, trembling, moaning.

An hour later, Murdo the shepherd, coming down from the mountain, and going by the Linn o' Mairg, so as to reach Inverglas by the west side of the Strath, heard a wild barking of his dogs. Through the heat-haze he stared indifferently, then curiously, at two stooping figures.

He approached the pool slowly. The dogs were silent. One had stopped, and was sniffing and staring, the other whined at his feet.

Yes, he was right, he muttered; it was Nial . . and Oona! But what did it mean?

Both sat silently by the Kelpie's Pool. The wild, fantastic, shrunken figure of Nial was black against the light. He seemed as though rapt, spellbound. The child was naked, her

shoulder reddening under the flame of the sun. He could see her strained, streaming eyes.

His heart beat quick with a vague fear as he moved toward them. He stopped, when Oona's low, irregular sobbing was audible.

Beside him the collies crouched, whining.

Nial looked round, rose, and touched Oona. She, too, rose; her sobbing breath ceasing.

"Màm-Gorm is dead," said Nial simply; "he is dead—*there*."

IX

In a brief space, Murdo learned what Nial could tell him. For all his shepherd-eyes, he could discern nothing in the pool but a vague blur of darkness far down.

What was he to do? He could not think, with these two staring at him there. He whispered to Nial that he would be back shortly, that he was going upstream to where Oona's clothes were; adding that when he brought them back Nial was to lead the little lass away, take her home, find and tell Sorcha.

When, some minutes later, Murdo returned with the small bundle, he saw that the child was weary with heat and fatigue, as well as

with what she had endured. There would be no trouble with her.

And indeed, when once she was in her scanty garb again, Oona went without a word. Nial whispered that he would be back as soon as he could; and would bring the grey horse with him.

The last Murdo saw of them was a momentary glimpse as they disappeared among the bracken, under the pines. The elf-man was carrying the sleeping Oona in his strong crooked arms.

The shepherd, who had betrayed no emotion as yet, stood staring into the pool. A mist came into his eyes, and one or two tears rolled down his furrowed face. A grim satisfaction moved into his mind, along with his dull pain; for now he remembered how his father, who had been shepherd on Màm-Gorm of Iolair before him, had had "the sight" of this very happening. The old man had been laughed at in the Strath; though, by the waterside, he had thrice seen Màm-Gorm's wraith rise out of the Kelpie's Pool. *Now* the foolish folk down there would not be laughing.

After a time he bethought himself that Nial might not be back for long. It was nigh upon noon, and he wished to get the body

away as soon as might be. It was now he remembered that Nial could not tell Sorcha, for he had met her and Alan going after the kye to the hill-pastures. This was well, meanwhile.

At the Ford of Ardoch there was an old boat not used for years past, save by himself, by Sorcha, or by Alan. In it were fishing-poles, a rope, and other things of his and Alan's. They would serve now, he muttered. So once more the gaunt, plaided shepherd strode upstream, mumbling, as he went, through his red tangled beard, and with his wild hill-eyes shining with the thoughts of life and death that were slowly filling his brain; thoughts, memories, superstitious fears, and vague, strange phantasma rising from the dull ache of sorrow.

To his ears the most familiar of sounds, the bleating of ewes and lambs, came down from the mountain as a lamentable cry. That night there would be dread in his heart, because of the lonely hillside, and the wide darkness, and the wraith that would be moving through that darkness.

Soon he found what he wanted, and speedily returned. At first he thought he would need help, but after a time he decided to do what he could himself. To one of the long

poles he fastened his shepherd staff, with its strong curved cromak.

The sweat poured from his face with heat and weariness long before he succeeded, at last, in getting a grip of the corpse. But, undaunted by failure after failure, and these even after he had first caught hold, he raised it slowly to the shelving ledge which ran out a few feet below the surface. The rest was easy. He slipped the rope over the feet, arms, and waist; then slid the body along the slippery ledge, and so with a rush to the face of the pool, and thence to a wide cranny in the rock beside him.

Sure, there was no mistake. Màm-Gorm himself, in truth; for all he was so quiet and pale, with the dark brown out of his face now, and all the stern, brooding life of the man no more than an already nigh-forgotten idle song.

So this was the end of Torcall Cameron of Màm-Gorm. There had been none prouder and more aloof than he in all Strath Iolair. Ay, he was a proud man. And now there was an end of it all. Sure, it was a bitter ending. God save us the dark hour of it. Ay, the dull knock and the muffled voice that come soon or late, in the mirk of day or night, at the soul-gate of each of us—Torcall

mhic Diarmid had heard them. . . . Thus, over and over, variously, yet ever on the same lines, Murdo revolved in his mind the passing of Màm-Gorm.

At last, to his satisfaction, he heard the peculiar cry which Nial was wont to give as a signal. Then followed the trampling of a horse: finally both appeared, coming along a stony path in the forest that in winter was a clattering watercourse.

It did not take long for the two to lift the body on to the small, shaggy white horse, and there to secure it; with the white face staring blankly up at the blue sky, the open eyes fronting with unwinking gaze the pitiless glare of the sun. While they worked, Nial told how he had carried Oona home, and laid her on Sorcha's bed, sound asleep and warm. He had feared to leave her there all alone, lest she waked, or lest evil came to her "out of the shadow"; but he did what he could, and that was to take down the great Book from the shelf by the bed where Torcall Cameron would sleep never again, and lay it at the lassie's feet. Then he had gone out to the kailyard, and let Donn the collie leave her two pups awhile, and had given her a shawl of Sorcha's to smell, and then had sent her up the mountain to seek for Màm-Gorm's

daughter, wherever she might be with the sheep and kye.

As soon as all was ready, the crossing of the Mairg Water was done at the Ford, and then the ascent begun to Ardoch-beag. Murdo stalked in front, the rope-bridle looped over his arm; Raoilt, the white mare, staggered and stumbled after him up the craggy path. Then came Nial, his shape not more fantastic than the shadow which waxed and waned mockingly before him, as he toiled upward, with bent head and tear-wet, quivering face. Finally, lagging some yards behind, limped Murdo's two collies.

The August heat-wave silenced every bird on the hillside. Not even the grouse cluttered. Far away, in a marshy place, there was a drumming of snipe.

The air was heavy with the smell of honey-ooze from the pale ling and the purple bell-heather. Now and again there was the sharp twang in it of the bog-myrtle, sweltering in the sunglow.

The thin dust rose from the path, or even from the face of the granite rocks. The shadows of the wayfarers lay pale-blue against the hill road, when the path widened into it. The dogs crawled, panting, their long tongues lolling like quivering, bloody snakes. Nial

wearily wagged his shaggy peaked head to and fro: at times, too, he let his great swollen tongue fall half out of his mouth, as though to cool the thirst of it against the parched air. Poor Raoilt sweated at every pore of her body, while dark streaks of wet ran down her flanks. Murdo showed less fatigue; but his weather-brown face had become deep red, and about his moist brow a haze of midges hovered. Quiet and cool, one only: cool and quiet, the rider on the white horse, for all that his face was as baked clay in the yellow glare, that his staring eyes were upon the whirling disc of flame in the zenith.

With a sigh of relief Murdo saw at last the cottage of the Gilchrists, sole house on the easter side of Tornideon.

Not a word had he said hitherto to Nial as to the taking of the corpse to Ardoch-beag. If the dwarf had thought of a destination at all, apart from Màm-Gorm, it was doubtless of the minister's house, which lay three miles beyond Ardoch-beag, at the far end of Inverglas.

But suddenly he waked to the knowledge that Murdo was off the road, and on the path leading to the byres of the widow Anabal.

What was the meaning of it? he asked; but Murdo would not hear. As they stopped at

the ring-stone, between the byre and the cottage, he went up to the shepherd.

"Why will you be doing this thing, Murdo MacMurdo?" he demanded.

At first the man gloomed upon him, then he smiled grimly.

"Wait."

Having said this, Murdo strode to the doorway of the cot. He knocked; there was no answer. He knocked again; again no answer. Then he opened the door. He did not expect to see Alan, but he was sure the woman Anabal would be in. There was no trace of her. The bed had not been slept in. The peats were black in the fireplace. Yet, strange to say, an open Bible lay on the low deal table, and on the near page was a pair of horn spectacles.

It was very strange. Well, he would search everywhere, both but and ben, outhouses and byre and stable.

There was not even a dog about the place.

He returned to Nial, downcast.

"There is a spell upon this place, Nial-of-the-woods. I wish we had not come."

"Why did you come?"

"This, man, this—*this*—is why!" he muttered savagely, and as he spoke he drew from his pocket a gold ring.

"That is one reason, Nial-of-the-woods! Look you, I found that ring in a crevice in the rocks on the further left side of the Linn o' Mairg. Look you again, I know the ring. Do you see these letters? Ah, well, you can't read, poor elfin-creature that you are; but I'll tell them to you. They are *F. G.* and *A. G.* And now will you be knowing what *F. G.* and *A. G.* are for? They are for Fergus Gilchrist and Anabal Gilchrist—*and this ring here, that I found by the Linn o' Mairg, is the wedding-ring of Anabal Gilchrist!*"

The outcast stared, vaguely impressed, but without understanding what Murdo was driving at. The man saw he was puzzled, so with a rough gesture he pulled him over to the near flank of the mare. "And here, you poor fool —*to Himself be the praise, for this and that!* —is the other reason. Look at *that!*"

What he pointed to was a long tress of grey hair, grey-streaked brown hair, firmly clutched in the right hand of the dead man.

A glimmering of Murdo's meaning came into Nial's mind. He glanced at the shepherd, appalled.

"Ay," whispered the latter, divining his thought: "sure, that there is nothing else but a tress of the hair of the woman Anabal. 'And you be telling me, Nial, if you can, what

Anabal Gilchrist was doing last night or to-day afore dawn, that she should leave her golden wedding-ring lying by the Linn-side, and that a tress of her hair—and there is none like it, no, none o' that witchy grey-brown, in all the Strath—should be held even now in the death-grip o' Torcall Cameron o' Màm-Gorm?"

"And that is why you have come here, with . . . with . . . *him?*"

"That is why."

The two looked at each other. A fierce anger and lust of revenge burned in the heart of the shepherd. To Nial everything was simply a horrible, incomprehensible mystery. But Murdo knew something, perhaps more than anyone else, of what had lain between Torcall Cameron and Anabal Gilchrist; whatever the outcast knew, or vaguely surmised, was too deep down in his mind now to swim up into remembrance.

It was Nial who broke the silence.

"What of Alan?"

"The curse is upon him too—to the Stones be it said!"

"He will be far up on the north side of Tornideon . . . or with Sorcha on Iolair."

"The woman must have fled. Or . . . ah, for sure, that thought was never coming to

me. Nial, my man, you never thought o' that, did you? You never thought that perhaps there were *two* bodies down there in the pool! Ay, for sure, for sure: Màm-Gorm was not the man to die alone!"

"Perhaps . . . Murdo, perhaps it was . . . perhaps it was . . . *he* who . . ."

The words failed. The gaunt shepherd looked down at the speaker, frowning darkly.

"May be, may be," he muttered at last. "If I thought *that*, I would be letting him lie in his own house. Nial, see that no word o' this gets upon your lips if you meet anyone. No one must think *that*. No one in the Strath must think an evil thing o' Màm-Gorm."

Once more Murdo left, and made a diligent search everywhere. When he came back, he was muttering constantly, with a wild look in his eyes.

"Did you hear *that?*" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"That? What? I heard nothing."

"Did ye not hear some one in the shadow ayont the byre crying, *Cian! Cian! Cian-alas! Dubhachas!*" [1]

[1] Pron. *Kĕ-ăn! Kĕ-ăn! Keen-ăl-ŭs! Doov-ăch-ŭs!* To Celtic ears, not unlike the wailing cry of the plover. The words, moreover, mean *For long, ever! Melancholy! Gloom!* The word *feadag* (pron.

"No, no," murmured Nial, trembling; "I saw the shadow of a bird on the grassy place yonder, and a cry like the *binn fheadag*."

"Ay, the feadag, the feadag, but no flying bird, for 'twas a wraith playing the dark song of the dead on the shadowy feadag that no man has ever seen, though there be those who hear it . . . God save us!"

Nial shuddered. It might be so, he thought. He believed he had seen a plover only, had heard no more than the wailing cry of a plover; but doubtless Murdo *knew*.

The shepherd stood staring at him gloomily. At last he spoke:

"This is a dark thing, Nial, my man. There is no light upon it to me whatever. But it will be looking to me as though I should go down to the Pool again, and be seeing if *she* is there to. And if not, then I must seek out Alan upon the hill. Do you think this thing too?"

Nial shook his head despondently; he could think neither one way nor another. Màm-

Fāād'ak), in the ensuing sentences, has two meanings—a plover, and a flute. The *binn fheadag* is "the shrill voice of the plover." Murdo turns the word both ways: *feadag*, the bird, and *feadag*, a flute; the flute made of wind and shadow that sometimes is heard on the hills when a (*tamhasq*) *tāvăsk* moves through the gloom of night.

Gorm lay there dead—white, stiff, staring up to the sun. He knew *that*.

"Ah, poor fool that you are," Murdo went on, pityingly, and as though talking to himself; "sure, I need not be asking you. How can a soulless thing o' the woods think? wi' a head like an addled egg, and a poor bit body withouten a spirit in it, as all decent folk have. Well, well, 'tis Himself has the good reason, praise be His! And now, Nial, I will be doing this thing. I told you the Book lay open on the table in there. Well, I will be for going by whatever the word is that is on my sight when I first look. If it tell me to go into Inverglas, and speak of this evil day, then it is going there I will be; if it tell me to go and seek in the Pool, well, I will be going there; and whatever I see, it will be the way for me. If I am to speak, it is speaking I will be; if I am to be silent, it is silent I will be."

And with that the shepherd turned, moved slowly away, and entered the cottage for the third time.

Where would he look? he wondered, when he stood by the table and stared down upon the open Gaelic Bible. Sure, he would accept the sign in the sentence across which Anabal's spectacles lay.

He stooped, and with pointing finger read slowly and with difficulty, word by word:

"*Cuir, a Thighearna, faire air mo bheul; gléidh dorus mo bhilean!*"
"*Set, O Lord, a watch before my mouth; keep the door of my lips!*"

"That will be enough," he muttered with bated breath, and went out. As he approached the horse, Nial saw that he had found the "wisdom." Vaguely he wondered if Murdo had noticed any "living words"—mysterious phrase that ever perplexed, and sometimes terrified him.

"Nial, I have found the word. It is not for me to go into the Strath with news of the dead. The Book said, "*Keep a watch before the mouth, keep the door of the lips.*" You understand . . . ? Ay, sure: poor, faithful creature that loved Màm-Gorm; ay, an' that Màm-Gorm, too, loved as much as Donn or Fior or any o' the dogs, wise beasties. . . . Well, I will be going now, down to the Pool: then, one way or the other, I will be looking for Alan Gilchrist. An' it is for you to wait here, Nial, lest he, or any other, come. We'll put the mare and . . . and . . . Màm-Gorm . . . into the byre just now. And you wait, you will be minding!"

In silence Raoilt, with her rigid burden, was led into the hot gloom of the byre. Then the door was partially closed, for there was no fastening to it, and Murdo made ready to go.

"Leave me one o' the dogs," said Nial sullenly.

"And for why?"

"I will not be staying here alone, in this treeless, foreign place, Murdo MacMurdo: no, that I won't, unless you will be leaving me one of the dogs."

The shepherd grunted surlily, for the collies were his best friends, and good company. But if so to be, then so to be. He would take Braon and leave Luath. It was safer, at such a time, to be alone with a dog than a bitch; for bitches were known often to be in league with demons and evil spirits. As for Nial, not being human himself, there would be less risk. Now that he noticed it, there was a red glare in Luath's eyes, and the bitch moved about in a strange way. For sure he would take Braon.

The time went wearily for the watcher at Ardoch-beag. The sweltering heat made him long doubly for the green forest that was his home. He did not dare enter that lonely house. Who or what might be sitting there,

or standing looking at him from the inner room? Neither could he venture into the byre, though, but for her awful burden, he would rather have the company of the mare Raoilt than of the bitch Luath.

For a long while he sat in the shadow of a dyke that was the south side of the winter sheepfold. But he grew more and more uneasy as time passed. What if Murdo did not come back till after nightfall?

He rose and stared about him. Where was Luath? He could not see the collie anywhere. He had noticed her trotting idly up the steep bend of the road beyond the cottage.

"Ah, there she is," he muttered, as he saw a shadow flit bluely across the blinding way. But what was the matter with the beast? She came along at a swift, slinking run, her tail skiffing the ground between her feet. As she passed, she gave him a furtive glance. The upper lip, taut, just showed a glimmer of white fangs.

"Luath! Luath! Luath!"

But the collie would pay no heed; or, rather, she paid this heed, that she broke into a race, and flew down the road to the Ford till she was no more than a black blur beyond a whirling eddy of dust.

This was the last straw. Nial gave one look

more all around him. Then he listened at the byre, to hear if Raoilt were munching at her hay. What if Màm-Gorm should get tired of being dead, and should dismount, and, rigid and white, step out into the sunlight! The thought made him shiver, for all the blazing heat.

Silently as his shadow, he was out upon the road. Suddenly the whim took him to go the other way rather than by the path he and the others had come. Below Cnoc-Ruadh the road dipped for a bit; and there was a sheep-path from it that would lead him down to the ford of Ath-na-chaorach, whence he would soon be in Iolair forest again.

But no Ford of the Sheep did Nial see that day.

For after he had reached the summit of the road at that part, to the westward of Ardoch-beag, he saw a sight that brought the heart suffocatingly to his mouth. It was this, then, that had made Luath slink swiftly away, with curled lip and bristling fell?

There, as though carven in stone, sat the woman Anabal, rigid and motionless as the thing that was in the byre. She was on the extreme verge of Cnoc-Ruadh, where a double ledge runs out from the great boulder which overhangs the Strath, and whence for

nigh upon a score of miles the eye can follow the course of Mairg Water.

At the far end a heat-haze obscured mountain-flank and bracken-slope, and birk-shaw —all save the extreme summits of the hills, purple-grey shadows against the gleaming sky. Nearer, in the north strath, the smoke of many cots, sheilings, and bothan rose in their perpendicular or spiral columns of pale blue mist.

From where Nial stood he could see her face. It was as wan and awful as that of the dead man in the byre, but he saw that the eyes lived. The woman sat dumb, blind, oblivious of the flaming heat, her gaze fixed, unwavering. Fire burned in them, a fire that would never be quenched till the day of the grave.

He could not tell whether she was alive or dead, whether a woman or a wraith. But he noted the long, tangled locks of hair which hung over her shoulder, brown hair streaked with grey, like the tress that the dead man still clutched in his right hand.

It was a thing to flee from. One desire only possessed him now, to reach the safe green quietudes of the pine-forest once more. There all was familiar; there he could evade man or wraith.

And so he, too, left that solitude where, once again, Torcall and Anabal were nigh one to another, and not knowing it.

How could he know—none but God knew—that in the woman's ears was the roar of the Linn forever? that the laughter of a kelpie wrought her ever to an excruciating terror? Dumb, motionless, staring unwaveringly: so was she at the flame-red setting, as she had been since the first blaze had lightened along the peaks of the east.

X

It was within an hour of nightfall when, from the verge of the forest below Màm-Gorm, Nial caught sight of the kye coming down from the hill-pastures. He could not see Sorcha, but he knew she must be there; probably with Alan, who for days past had been wont to depute his own shepherding on Tornideon to a herd-laddie who lived with an old drover just beyond the Pass of the Eagles.

Nial had already been up at the farm. Oona lay where he had left her, and was still in the same profound and, but for her low breathing, deathlike slumber. Thence he had wandered

back to the forest, thinking that he would descend toward the Linn o' Mairg, and see if Murdo were still there in his quest for Anabal. He had scarce entered the pine-glades when, happening to glance backward, he saw the cows coming home.

Sure enough, in a few minutes Sorcha appeared: and, as he had surmised, Alan with her. They walked together, his arm about her waist, while slowly they followed the leisurely kye. As they came nearer, Nial heard Sorcha singing one of her many milking songs. Often he had heard her sing that which now came rippling down the heather, and he could have given her word for word for it.

O sweet St. Bride of the
    Yellow, yellow hair:
Paul said, and Peter said,
And all the saints alive or dead
Vowed she had the sweetest head,
Bonnie, sweet St. Bride of the
    Yellow, yellow hair.

White may my milking be,
    White as thee:
Thy face is white, thy neck is white,
Thy hands are white, thy feet are white,
For thy sweet soul is shining bright—
    O dear to me,
    O dear to see,
    St. Bridget white!

Yellow may my butter be,
Soft and round:
Thy breasts are sweet,
Soft, round, and sweet
So may my butter be:
So may my butter be, O
Bridget sweet!

Safe thy way is, safe, O
Safe, St. Bride:
May my kye come home at even,
None be fallin', none be leavin',
Dusky even, breath-sweet even
Here, as there, where, O
St. Bride, thou

Keepest tryst with God in heav'n,
Seest the angels bow
And souls be shriven—
Here, as there, 'tis breath-sweet even,
Far and wide—
Singeth thy little maid
Safe in thy shade,
Bridget, Bride!"

Nial hesitated. He would have gone to her at once, but he did not wish to speak before Alan. Moreover, what was he to say to Angus Óg, as Anabal's son was called by the strath folk on account of his beauty and because he was a dreamer and a poet, though but a shepherd of the hills? How could he tell of Murdo's quest by the pool, and also of the

spirit or wraith he had seen sitting on Cnoc-Ruadh that is beyond Ardoch-beag on Tornideon?

The flanks of the cows gleamed in the light as with filled udders they swung slowly homeward, their breaths showing in whorls of mist whenever they were in shadow, where the dews were already falling after the extreme of heat. Behind them, now on a sloping buttress of rock and heather, now on the smooth thymy hollows which lay like green pools among the purple ling, Alan and Sorcha moved, both bathed in the sunglow, his left hand clasping her right and swinging slow. Ah, fair to see, thought Nial: fair to see!

But, even while he pondered, he saw Alan take Sorcha in his arms, kiss her, and then, with lingering hand-clasp, turn to go up the mountain again, or, as might be, to cross to Tornideon. Not far did he go, though: for, as Nial watched, he saw Sorcha's lover lean against a great boulder, where he stood like a fair god, because of the sunflood falling upon him in gold waves out of the west. Beautiful the rolling of that sea of light across the sloping surface of the forest: with the yellow-shining billows flowing and rippling among the summits of the pines, and ever and again

spilling into branchy crevices or dark green underglooms.

Doubtless Alan was waiting to see her reach Màm-Gorm, and perhaps for a signal thereafter: if so, thought Nial, he had best see Sorcha at once, though he knew not the way of the thing to be said, or if he could speak at all while Oona slept.

Slowly he moved toward her. She had descried him, for she did not follow the cows, but stood, waiting. The gloaming was already about her. She was like a spirit, he thought, with the windy hair about her face—for with the going of the sun a sudden eddy had arisen, and the air of its furtive, wavering pinions was upon Sorcha.

"Nial!" she cried blithely, when he was a brief way off, "is the peat-smoke a bird, that it has flown away from the house—for not a breath of smoke do I see? Is father in? and Oona? Have you seen her? I've called thrice, but St. Bridget herself wouldn't be having an answer from Oona if she's hiding somewhere. *Oona! . . . Oona! . . . Oona!*"

"Don't be calling upon the child, Sorcha. She is tired, and is sleeping."

"And father?"

Then in his heart of hearts Nial knew that

he had not the courage to say what he had to say. Sure, too, there was something he did not understand. After all, the woman he had seen on Cnoc-Ruadh could be no other than Anabal Gilchrist. And if *she* could be drowned and yet come alive again, perhaps Torcall Cameron could—ay, was perhaps already up and, blind as he was, feeling blankly round the walls of the strange place he was in, to be out soon, and, later, in the dark, come striding into Màm-Gorm.

"And father, Nial, and father? Is he in, or is he out upon the hill, with the gloom upon him this night again?"

"It will be a strange thing that I am telling you, *Sorcha-nighean-Thorcall,* but one that will be glad and warm in your heart."

"Speak."

"There is . . . there is peace now between Màm-Gorm and the woman Anabal, that is mother of Alan."

"Peace!—oh, Nial! To Himself the praise of it! Oh, glad I am at the good thing that you say! Sure, glad am I!"

"It is true. Ay, and he has gone over to Tornideon, and will sleep this night at Ardoch-beag."

Sorcha stared bewildered. Even her joy at the news, which meant so much for her and

Alan, was forgotten in sheer amaze. Her father go to Tornideon! her father asleep at Ardoch-beag!

Words of his came to her remembrance: she, too, muttered, "My soul swims in mist."

"Nial, is this—a true thing? . . ."

"Ay."

"Is it—is it—a true thing that he is up at Ardoch-beag, and will sleep there . . . and . . . and . . . is at peace?"

"Ay, sure, he is up at Ardoch-beag, and will sleep there, and sure, too, sure, he is at peace."

A wonderful light came into the girl's beautiful eyes. Her twilight beauty was now as a starry dusk.

"Nial," she whispered, "dear Nial, you and Murdo see to the milking of the kye for me this night . . . do, dear good Nial, do! And you can ask Oona, too, to help you . . . for . . . for, Nial, all is well now . . . and I can go to Alan . . . oh, glad am I, and like as though a bird sang in my heart!"

And then, before he realised what he had brought upon himself, before he could say a word of yea or nay, Sorcha had turned, and with swift steps was hurrying through the gloaming to where Alan still stood on the hill-

side, watching and dreaming, dreaming and hoping.

Nial stood gazing after her. Strange, this mystery of beauty! All his trouble waned out of the glare of day into a cool twilight. The passing of her there on the hill was like music in his ears. Ah, to be Alan, to have so tall and strong a body, so fair a face, to have Sorcha's love, to have a soul! The fairer soul the fairer body—that seemed to him a truth; for what had he to go by but the three he knew best and loved best: Oona and Sorcha and Alan, the fairest man, the most beautiful woman, the loveliest child he had ever seen or dreamed of there in Strath Iolair, or during those mysterious wanderings of his when he was far from the mountain-land with the gipsy-people? No beauty like theirs, no others like them in any way; sure, it was because the souls of them were white, and all three kindred of the forgotten "people of the sun," whom Sorcha sometimes sang or spoke of as the Tuatha-de-Dánan, and Màm-Gorm had told him once were old, forgotten gods—fair, deathless folk!

In truth it was with joy that Sorcha hastened toward Alan. He saw the light in her eyes before she was near enough to speak. Often, beholding her, he was aware of some-

thing within him that was as a sun-dazzle to the eye that looks upon a shining sea or a cloudless noon. Sometimes his heart beat low, and an awe made a hushed, fragrant, green-gloom dusk in his brain; sometimes he grew faint, strangely wrought, as a worshipper when the spirit for a brief moment unveils its sanctuary and irradiates, transforms the whole trembling body, but most the face and the eyes of wonder. At other times all the poet in him arose. Then he laughed low with joy because of her beauty; and saw in her the loveliness of the mountain-land. Then it was that she was his "Dream," his "Twilight," his "Shining star," his "Soft breath of dusk." Dear she was to him as the fawn to the hind, sweet as the bell-heather to the wild bee, lovely and sweet and dear beyond all words to say, all thought to image. Then there were their blithe hours of youth—hours when he was *Alan-aluinn* and she *Sorcha-maiseach;* seasons of laughing happiness and light ripple of the waters of peace. Children of the sun they were in truth, in a deeper sense than they, as all the kindred of the Gael, were children of the mist.

But of late both—and he particularly—had been wrought more and more by the passion of love. Ever since the refusal of the minister at Inverglas to marry them, because of the

feud between Torcall Cameron and Anabal Gilchrist, and of the ban laid by each against the offspring of the other, they had troubled themselves no more about what, after all, to them, in their remote life in these mountain solitudes, meant little. In the dewy, moth-haunted, fragrant nights of May, when it was never quite dark upon the hills, and even in the forest the pine-boles loomed shadowy, they had become dearer than ever to each other. Day by day thereafter their joy had grown, like a flower moving ever to the sun; and as it grew, the roots deepened, and the tendrils met and intertwined round the two hearts, till at last they were drawn together and became one, as two moving rays of light will converge into one beam, or the song of two singers blend and become as the song of one. As the weeks passed, the wonder of the dream became at times a brooding passion, at times almost an ecstasy. Ossian and the poets of old speak of a strange frenzy that came upon the brave; and, sure, there is a *mircath* [1]

[1] The "mircath," or war-frenzy, is *mire-chath*, the "passion of battle," as the "mirdeeay" is *mire-dheidh*, the "passion of longing." The word Darthula—*infra*—is a later Gaelic variant of *Dearduil* (almost identically pronounced), the Scoto-Gaelic equivalent of the Erse *Deirdrê*, the most beautiful woman of old.

in love now and again in the world, in the green, remote places at least. Aodh the islander, and Ian-bàn of the hills, and other dreamer-poets know of it—the *mirdhei,* the passion that is deeper than passion, the dream that is beyond the dreamer, the ecstasy that is the rapture of the soul, with the body nigh forgot.

This *mirdhei* was now more and more upon Alan; upon Sorcha, too, the dream-spell lay.

So it was in a glad silence that he watched her coming. For the moment she was not Sorcha, but a *Bándia-nan-slèibhtean,* a goddess of the hills, fair as the *Banrigh-nan-Aillsean,* the fairy queen. Often, singing or telling her some of the songs of Oisìn mhic Fhionn, he had called her *his* Darthula, after that fairest of women in the days of old, because she too had deep eyes of beauty and wonder. Therefore the word came out of his heart, like the single mating-note of a mavis, when, as she drew nigh to him and whispered low, *"Alan! Alan!"* he murmured only *"Darthula . . . Darthula-mochree!"*

In a few words she told him the marvellous news: Torcall and Anabal at peace; her father now at Ardoch-beag!

At first he too could scarce believe it. Then, little by little, the smaller wonder

waned, and the wonder of his love—the wonder of Sorcha grew.

Hand in hand they wandered slowly up the mountain as in a dream. A strange new joy had come to them. The world fell further away, far beneath them. Even the Strath became a shadowy place—a foreign strand where their voyaging boats need never coast.

When the moon rose, first through a tremulous flood of amber-yellow light, thence to emerge as a pale-gold flower, low in the *Lios-nan-speur,* the "garden of the starry heavens," the mountain lovers were already far up Ben Iolair, and nigh the great Sgòrr-Glan, the precipice that on the eastern flank falls sheer from the Druim-nan-Damh, the Ridge of the Stags, for close upon two thousand feet. Here in a sheltered place known as the *Bad-a-sgailich ann choire-na-gaoithe,* "the shading clump of trees in the windy corrie," was the sheiling of Murdo the shepherd, which for weeks past had been used by Alan rather than his own hill-sheiling high on Tornideon, where the east wind blew with a fierce breath, and the hill-slope was barren, and there was no Sorcha.

They could hear the wind among the heights, but the moon-wave was everywhere with quiet light, and there was peace.

For a while they stood at the door of the cot. The moonshine touched them with a beam of pale gold—a finger out of heaven. Silent and still it was: no sound but the furtive crying of the wind among the invisible corries and peaks, with a flute-like call among the serrated pinnacles of the Ridge of the Stags. At intervals, as a vagrant breath, came the sigh of the hill-torrents as they fell toward the Srùantsrhà, the wild stream that foams from the lochan of Mairg beyond the Pass of the Eagles, and surges hoarse and dark, even in the summer droughts, at the base of the great precipice of Sgòrr-Glan.

Hand in hand they stood, silence between them. Their eyes dreamed into the moonlit dusk. In the mind of Alan Sorcha moved as a vision; in the mind of Sorcha there were two shadowy figures of dream—Alan, and the child over whose faint breath of life in her womb her heart yearned as a brooding dove.

When Oona awoke she saw that it was dark. In the peat-glow she could descry the figure of Nial crouching in the shadow of the ingle, his gaze fixed upon her.

"What is it, Nial? what have you been doing?"

The dwarf saw that as yet she had not re-

membered. He feared for the child, though he knew not, what none knew, how the strange fatalism of the race was already strong within her, strong and compelling as hunger, thirst, or sleep.

"Oona, my fawn, you must have food. I am hungry too. You have not eaten since last night."

A startled look came into her eyes. He saw it, and hurriedly resumed:

"So, a little ago, I lit the peats, which had smouldered into ash; and now, bonnie wee doo, I will be making the porridge for you, and see . . . the water is boiling that is in the kettle, and I'm thinking it is singing *Oona, Oona, mochree, Oona, Oona, mochree, come and be having the food with poor Nial!* And, Oona, look you, there is the warm milk, and the bread; for I milked the brown cow Aillsha-bàn, when Sorcha went up the hill with Alan. An' I couldn't be milking the white one, Gealcas, for she wouldn't give without Sorcha's singing, an' I could not be minding that song; no, not I; but I knew the song for Aillsha-bàn:

"Aillsha-bàn, Aillsha-bàn,
Give way to the milking!
The holy St. Bridget
Is milking, milking

This self-same even
The white kye in heaven—
Ay, sure, my eyes scan
The green place she is in,
Aillsha-bàn, Aillsha-bàn:
And her hand is so soft
And her crooning is sweet
As my milking is soft
Upon thee, Aills ha-bàn—
As my crooning is sweet
Upon thee, Aillsha-bàn,
Aillsha-bàn—
So soft is my hand and
My crooning so sweet,
Aillsha-bàn!"

Poor Nial's singing was not restful, for his voice was at all times shrill and hoarse, and now it had an added quaver in it. But Oona listened, drowsily content.

She had remembered all. Yes: Sorcha was right that day when she said Death roamed through every hour, and that the moment before each new hour Death stood at the door and broke the link that held the going and the coming in one bond.

If her foster-father was dead, he was dead. The fact was absolute to her. Once she had seen a stag die. She had been up near the summit of Iolair, and was about to quench her thirst from a small black tarn, hid among the rocks, when she caught sight of a

wounded deer. The hunter had maimed, not slain it: and though it had escaped, it was only to sink with weariness by the tarn, and lie there watching its blood trickle steadily into the crimsoned water, till there should be no more flow. As long as life remained in the stricken beast, Oona could not believe in the possibility of death. In its extremity it made no further effort when she drew close: only a gurgling sob showed its broken heart, and great tears fell from its violet eyes. Either instinct let the stag know that she would do it no harm, or it was too weak to resent a touch: but in the end the dying deer let Oona take its nozzle in her lap, while she smoothed the velvety skin and wiped away the blood and sweat. Even when, kissing it and calling it tender impossible names, she saw the veil come over the eyes, she could not admit that death could come *then—there*. But when there was not a quiver, and the rigid limbs were cold, her tears dried, and she looked at it meditatively. It was dead: what had she in common with it? A little ago, her heart throbbed with loving pity: now she glanced at the great beast curiously. Its strong odour was disagreeable: its bloodied mouth and breast disgusted her. There was no good in being sorry. It was dead.

In a different, but kindred way, her foster-father was the stricken deer. She had seen him almost to his death: she had seen the drowned body: almost she had died of her wild and passionate grief. Then she had slept through the noon-heats, and the afternoon, and the evening: and now she awoke to the no longer overwhelming but irrefutable fact, that her foster-father was dead.

She had meant well. Why did the woman Anabal not see to the blind man? But it did not matter. He was dead now: dead. God willed it so. It was to be. Not all the striving in the world could have prevented this. In wild winter nights, before the peats, she had heard Torcall himself chant the rune of Aodh the poet, with that haunting ending which Sorcha sang often to herself; that Alan had on his lips at times as always in his heart; and that even Murdo muttered when it was tempestuous weather, and Death was abroad, and the gloom of the rocks was heavy upon him. Ah, the words evaded her: but Nial would know, Nial who was the tuneless harp that caught all wandering strains, from sheiling-song to the way of the wind among leaves.

"Nial: what is the thing that Sorcha sings often . . . and that . . . that *he* sang sometimes, about the quiet at the end?"

Nial stared, puzzled for a moment: then he repeated in a low voice:

> *"Deireadh gach comuinn, sgaoileadh:*
> *Deireadh gach cogaidh, sìth!"*

Over and over Oona murmured the words: *"The end of all meeting, parting: the end of all striving, peace."*

She was tired. She would think no more about her foster-father. He had seen God by now. He would know why she ran away from the Linn: and how the fear was upon her in the wood: and, afterward, how the sorrow of him pulled at her heart. And now . . .

How she wished Sorcha were home, to sing to her! Warm was the peat-glow, and she was tired. She closed her eyes again, murmuring drowsily the refrain of an old song.

Silence was in the dusky room again. Nial sat crouching by the fire: patient, as was his wont. There was not a sound within, save the low breathing of the child and the dull spurtle of the flame among the red fibres on the undersides of the peats. Outside there was a melancholy wail in the sough of the hill-wind.

The first hour of the dark passed. What was the night to bring forth? he wondered. Where was Murdo? what had he found?

Another hour passed. A weary sleep was

on him. He dozed, woke, stared at the shadowy figure of Oona, dozed again. At last he too slumbered, the *duain-samhach* that is too calm for dreams, too deep for sorrow.

It was in the middle of the third hour that he stirred because of the howling of a dog.

Nial could do what was impossible even for Murdo the shepherd: he could tell in the dark, and by the sound only, which of the dogs barked. He knew now that the howling came neither from Donn nor Luath. It was not the coming of Murdo, then, for these were his two dogs, and that was not the howl of either. If they were near, their baying would be audible.

Yes, it was Fior. She must have left her pups, and be roaming round the sheiling. Why was she not in the barn? What had alarmed her?

If it were not because of Oona, he would go and quiet her. Tenderly he glanced toward the bed. He rose slowly, his heart beating.

In the flicker of the fire he saw the child sitting upright, her eyes wide open and staring fixedly.

She said no word. He feared to speak. Her unwavering gaze disconcerted him, though now he saw that it was not upon him. He would just whisper to her, he thought:

"Oona-mùirnean, Oona-uanachan, it is only Fior. She will be baying against the moon, because of the spell against her pups."

She paid no attention to him. He shivered as he saw that her eyes were now unnaturally bright: and that their gaze shifted, as though they followed one who moved about the room.

The child shivered, but seemed more in startled amaze than dread. There was more fear in Nial than with her, when he heard her speak.

"Why do you come here?"

Nial stared. There was no one visible.

"*Is coma leam thu!* I hate you, I hate you!" cried the child, with a passionate sob. "Go back to him! I left him with you! He is not here; he is dead . . . he is dead . . . he is dead!"

Trembling, the dwarf advanced a step or two.

"Oona! Oona! It is I, Nial! Speak to me!"

"Stand back, Nial: the woman Anabal, wife of Fergus, is speaking to me."

With a groan he staggered to one side. Was she here, then, and not still sitting on the great rock overlooking the Strath? Sure, then, a spirit must she be: and no wraith now, for his eyes were void of her.

But for all his dread, he must guard his lamb. If only he knew one of the spells in the Book, that he had placed at Oona's feet!

"And what will An—what will she be saying to you, my bird?"

"She says: '*Leanabh, dh' èirich dha; dh' èirich domh; eiridh dhuit!*'"

Nial slowly repeated the words below his breath: "*Child, it has happened to him; it has happened to me; it will happen to you.*" Oona must be ill, he thought; as Murdo was two winters ago, that time he came back from the Strath, on the last night of the year, lurching and swaying, and saying wild, meaningless things.

"And what else will she be saying to you, birdeen?"

"'*Thig thu gu h'anamoch!*'"

"'*Thou shalt come later*'; sure now, dear, there is no meaning in that! Oona, my bonnie, lie down; lie down, wee lassie, and sleep, and sleep!"

But even as he spoke, he saw a change in her face. It was like moonshine suddenly moving on dark water.

He caught fragmentary words . . . *suain* . . . *sìth* . . . and then, with "sleep" and "peace" still on her lips, she lay back, smiling.

Slowly and soundlessly he approached the bed. In the intense stillness he heard his breath going like the slow, heavy beat of a heron's wing. Outside, the baying of the dog had suddenly ceased.

She was asleep, or nigh so. He stooped and kissed the yellow tangles that overspread the pillow.

Her lips moved.

What was the thing she whispered? He could not hear; ah, she was murmuring it again: ". . . *anail . . . breath of . . . breath of a . . .*"

"*Hush-sh-sh,* birdeen," he whispered low; then, seeing that her lips again muttered drowsily, he put his ear to them.

"*And then . . . she . . . smiled . . . and said: Do not . . . fear!* (a pause, a sigh) *. . . sacred is the . . . breath . . . the breath of . . . a mother.*"

The child slept. He stole back to the ingle. There was peace now; even the wind, though it moaned and swelled more and more loudly, was as a soothing song.

And so the night passed; Nial sleeping fitfully, waking often, and ever when he woke pondering that last saying of the child, *Is blàth anail na mathar.*

XI

That night, any wayfarer going down Strath Iolair, between the Pass of the Eagles and Inverglas, must have been startled by a windy blaze of flame against the slope of Tornideon.

Since sundown the wind had increased in strength. The loud clarion-call could be heard unceasing on the hills. Through the Pass it came with long wail or dreary sough, then with a howl would swoop along Mairg Water, with a noise that washed away the roar of the Linn.

One man, at least, saw it. Under an arch of rock, in a space half filled with fragrant dry bracken, Murdo the shepherd watched.

Doggedness was at once Murdo's strength and weakness. He had been convinced that Anabal Gilchrist, guilty or innocent, had perished along with Torcall Cameron. He had come to the Linn, and till he found her he would wait. Moreover, had he not the word of the Scriptures for it, bidding him be silent? What need, then, for him to go about as an idle rumour? All would be known in time without *his* telling.

When at last the twilight came, he was still there. If he could not see the body of Anabal

in Mairg Water—and he knew that, if there, it would soon or late be swirled out of the Linn or the Kelpie's Pool—he would wait till he saw her wraith.

There were many things—like certain stories told of the speed of great vessels at sea, and about what the electricity, out of which the lightning came, could be made to do—which he doubted, or at least discounted in the telling. But in the sure wisdom of his fathers he knew there was no rock of stumbling; therefore he was well aware that the wraith of the dead comes to and fro between its death-place and that darkness which is deeper than the mirk of the blackest night, on the night following its severance from the body. So, he would wait and see. If her wraith came from up the Strath or from down the hill, he would know that she had not died in the water. Wherever it came from, he would follow it.

He had seen too much, he muttered again and again to himself, with quaking heart: he had seen too much in hill-gloamings and drear mountain nights to have fear of the wraith of a poor widow-body, who lived no further away than over against Cnoc-Ruadh on Tornideon. The moaning and loud soughing of the wind tried him sore. But the night was

cloudless, and the moon hung above Iolair, a beacon everywhere in the dark. Then, too, as the hours went, he grew warm and comfortable in his rocky lair; moreover, fresh text after text came into his mind. In multiplicity of these was safety; even were some of them no more than "And Chelub, the brother of Shunah, begat Mehir," or than that (to Murdo, blasphemously familiar) saying in Isaiah, "In that day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired"—though, sure, to his shepherd mind, there was comfortable word as of home, as well as sacred influence, in "And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep."

He had been dozing when the first spurt of flame broke out upon Tornideon. A little later he roused with a start, and looked out upon the Pool. There was a gleam there, or somewhere; could it be the woman Anabal?

Then his gaze was drawn swift and steadfast, as iron to a magnet. He realised what and where the flames were. Ardoch-beag was on fire.

In a moment there flashed upon him the recollection of Màm-Gorm, on the white mare Raoilt, in the byre there.

With the thought came another, that he had

been mad to believe Anabal was in the Pool at all. She must have discovered the body of Torcall, and set fire to the place—corpse, mare, and byre! There was not a moment to lose. Yet, perhaps it was Alan; well, even then, he muttered, he must go. But supposing . . . *but supposing* . . . that . . . that Màm-Gorm himself . . .

Murdo did not know what to do. The dogs would help him, he thought. Crawling from his hiding-place, he whistled to Donn and Luath. Both collies had already crept from the fern, and were standing with stiffened tails and rigid bodies, intently watching the shooting, darting, leaping, ever-spreading flame on the hill opposite. Abruptly, Luath began to growl. Then Donn stole, whining, to the shepherd's feet.

"What ails the dogs?" he muttered, half angrily.

A few minutes later his keen eyes discerned the cause of their uneasiness. The full flood of the moonlight was upon the flank of Tornideon, and it was now possible to see along the whole path from Ardoch-beag to the Ford, "*glan mar a ghrian,*" as he said to himself—clear as in the sunlight.

And this was the thing that Murdo the shepherd saw, to be with him to his death-day,

and to be for ever in Strath Iolair a legend of terror.

Down the steep descent that began to fall away a few yards beyond Ardoch-beag, he saw a tall, gaunt woman, with rent garments and long, loosened hair fluttering in the wind, striding down the hillway, often with wild gestures. And before the woman trampled and snorted a horse, mad with the fear of the flame, and knowing, too, it may be, the awful burden of death it bore, now swung crosswise upon its back. As a mad horse will do, it pranced in a strange, stiff, fantastic way: wild to leap forward and race like the wind from what lay behind, from what jerked and jolted above; yet constrained as by another than human force.

Ever and again, in a momentary lull of the wind, Murdo could hear its shrill, appalling neighing. Once, too, he shrank, because of the screaming laughter of the woman.

Furlong by furlong he watched this ghastly march of the dead and dying. Were it not for the flames at Ardoch-beag, where both house and byre were now caught in a swirling blaze, he would have believed the other to be no more than a vision.

With difficulty he silenced the dogs. He would stay where he was now, and see what

was going to be done that night: for it was clear that Anabal, seemingly mad, and having set fire to Ardoch-beag, was now driving Raoilt and its corpse-burthen either down to Mairg Water, or with intent to cross and go up the mountain of Màm-Gorm.

This last, indeed, was evidently her aim: for, when at last the Ford was reached, Murdo could see her striving to make the affrighted mare enter the shallows. Raoilt, however, would not budge. With forelegs planted firmly, with head thrown up, quivering flanks, and long tail slashing this way and that, the white mare showed some strange horror of the swift-running ford-water. Suddenly she swung round, and with a grotesque prancing moved along the north bank toward the Linn.

They were now close to him. Murdo could see the bloodshot, gleaming eyeballs of Raoilt: the white set face and staring eyes of Anabal. Either the roar of the whirlpool, or the sight of one of the collies slinking terrified through the fern, added a new terror to the mare. She swerved wildly. The burden she bore became still further unloosed. With scraping hoofs she pawed at a bank of heather, in a vain attempt to find solid footing. A plunge . . . a fall backward . . . a staggering recovery

among the very rocks of the Linn . . . and . . . freedom at last!

But, for the second time since Murdo had last seen him in life, Torcall Cameron was hurled headlong into the Linn o' Mairg.

With a cry the shepherd sprang forward. Anabal heard, but did not see. All she knew was the roar of the linn, the wail of the kelpie, and *that*—that withering scream of the dead man.

For a moment she stood on the verge of the cataract. Her arms were upraised: her whole body moved with one unutterable supplication.

"*Fergus! Fergus!*"

The wild appeal rang through the night, above the turmoil of the falling water, the increasing moan and loud blasting vehemence of the wind.

Murdo did not see her leap or fall. His gaze had for a moment sought the mare, who, at that cry, had leaped as though stung by fire, and was careering at breakneck speed up the boulder-strewn bank by which she had come.

But when the shepherd looked again, Anabal Gilchrist was gone.

Throughout that night there was a wilder sound on the hillside than any wail of the wind. This was the screaming of the white

horse, as, wrought now to a death-madness, it leaped waywardly through the dark, so passing from height to height upward along the whole mountainal flank of Iolair.

At dawn, in the sheiling high up on Druim-nan-Damh, Sorcha awoke, trembling.

For a time she listened in awe to the majesty of the wind, a vast choric chant that filled the morning-twilight with an ocean of flowing sound. Then, again and again, she heard that strange, horrible scream.

Alan stirred. She whispered as she drew closer to him. He, too, listened. A great fear lay upon both. This screaming voice in the night was an omen of sorrow, of doom. Who could it be but the Bandruidh—that evil sorceress of the hills, dark daughter of the Haughty Father, who had already won the soul out of Nial?

Sleep was impossible. It was banished even from thought, when a wild neighing close to the walls of the cot made Sorcha cry out and cling to Alan as though death were already upon them.

They lay shuddering. Clearly this was one of the water-bulls or water-horses which roam the mountain-ways on nights of storm: dread demon-creatures, to see whom even is almost certain death.

" It will not be long till sunrise," Alan whispered; and by that Sorcha was comforted, for she knew that the ravening thing outside would have to haste back to loch or river or sea.

And by daybreak, in truth, the beast was already away. They heard the clamour of its hoofs against the granite stones and rock, as it sped upward still.

When, hand clasping hand, they ventured to go out, they could see no living thing, but an eagle soaring high above the extreme peak of Iolair: for the light of the new glorious day was in their eyes as they faced the Ridge of the Stags.

But suddenly Sorcha caught sight of something white leaping against the sunrise.

Alan's gaze followed her trembling arm and outstretched finger. He, too, saw, but unrecognisingly, a white horse, prancing and screaming along the verge of the granite precipice of Sgòrr-Glan.

The mad beast was now on the Sgòrr itself. Behind were deep corries and ravines: in front, nothing but the flaming disc of fire, nothing but that sheer blank wall of granite, straight from the brow of the Sgòrr to where the Srúantsrhà surged darkly its tortuous way, two thousand feet below.

A faint, impalpable mist was in the air. This, doubtless, it was that made the white horse loom larger and larger, till it stood out against the morning, vast as Liath-Macha, the untamable phantom steed, "grey to whiteness," that Cuculain the Hero rode triumphantly through the valley of the shadow of death.

Then it was as though it leaped against the sun itself.

XII

Week after week went by, changelessly fine, so that in the Strath men began to shake their heads ominously because of the long drought. In the memory of none had there been an autumn so lovely. For a brief spell, in mid August, coming indeed with the storm of wind which had helped the flames utterly to consume the few poor buildings of Anabal Gilchrist on Tornideon, great clouds had travelled inland from the Atlantic, and had burst floodingly upon hill and valley. But in less than a week the sky was clear again, and of a richer, deeper blue. The whole mountain-land was veiled in beauty.

The woods at the end of October were, other than the pine-forests, a blaze of glory.

Few leaves had fallen, except from the limes and sycamores, and these sparsely only . . . scarce enough to lay a pathway of flakes of yellow gold before the hinds and fawns that trooped through the sunlit glades. The innumerable rowan-trees wore fiery hues upon their feathery foliage: everywhere the scarlet berries suspended in blood-red clusters against the blue sky or the cool greenness.

The dream, the spell, was not only upon the beautiful green earth. It lay elsewhere than there, or in the deeps of heaven: elsewhere than on the quiet waters which slept against the shores beyond the mountains and slumbered immeasurably toward the ever-receding west, with a soft moaning only, wonderful and sweet to hear.

For it was upon the heart and in the brain of each of the mountaineers of Iolair: but most upon Sorcha and Alan.

For them the days had gone past, days of rapt happiness in that golden weather. Already the world had become to them no more than a dream. They went to and fro, hushed, upon the hills, each oblivious of all save the other, all save the ceaseless thrilling wonder of the pageant of the hours from dawn to moonset. That strange rapture which comes

at times to isolated, visionary dreamers upon the hills, wrought a spell upon Alan. Scarce less was it upon Sorcha, and that less only, if at all, because of the second life that she sustained. The "mirdeeay" was a glamour in their eyes, in their mind, in their heart, from the hour of the waning star to the coming of night. Not all an evil thing is it to dream. The world well lost! Ah, shadowy-eyed dreamers that know the secret wisdom, it is well to dream!

None of the Strath-folk saw them now. The people murmured against them because of the tragic mystery of the deaths of Torcall Cameron and Anabal Gilchrist. Little had been learned from Murdo, and none now encountered Oona or Nial. But a dropped word, a reluctant admission, a careful evasion, from the shepherd, went far. Hints grew into a legend: soon a perverted yet not wholly misleading version of the facts became current.

On the same morning when, from the mountain-sheiling, they had seen the white mare, screaming in her madness, leap from the precipice of Sgòrr-Glan, as though full against the sun, Alan and Sorcha learned from Murdo what had happened. Below all the grief and horror of the double tragedy,

there was one thing not to be gainsaid. The hand of God was here.

After their first passionate sorrow they whispered this thing the one to the other. It was ordained. God had wrought thus with the thread of all their lives. There was none to blame, neither Torcall, nor Anabal, nor the child Oona, unwitting instrument of the Divine will. *Is duilich cuir an aghaidh dàn:* Who can oppose Fate, who set himself against Destiny?

A strange thing, that had a terrifying significance for the Strath-dwellers, was this: never were the bodies of Torcall Cameron and Anabal Gilchrist found. The Linn was dragged, the Kelpie's Pool poled over and over, the lower reaches of Mairg Water were examined under every shelving bank, or wherever a sunken bole or submerged boulder might have caught the castaways. No trace was seen anywhere, then or later. Possibly it was true, what an old man of Inverglas averred, that there was a slope at the bottom of the Kelpie's Pool, which ran in beneath a shelving ledge, whence the water poured down a funnel-like passage into a cavern filled with stalactites, through the innumerable holes and crannies at the base of which the flow vanished even as it came.

He had this knowledge, he said, from his father before him, who in the great drought of the first year of the century had seen the Pool shrunken so that a man might stand in it and yet not be wet above the knees. "And the word of my father will not be for doubting," the old crofter added: "for he lived with God before him till he died, and now was with his own folk in Flaitheanas itself, praising Himself for evermore."

Thereafter, as was but natural, the home upon Tornideon being no more, Alan and Sorcha lived at Màm-Gorm. There was none to dispute their possession, for Torcall Cameron was without blood-kin, and all that was his was Sorcha's.

So week after week went by. Even in the Strath the people said: "It was willed." There was no man nor woman among them, even of those who were angry with Sorcha that she was not wedded before the minister —forgetful, always, that it was the minister who had refused to wed Alan and Sorcha, because of the feud between Torcall and Anabal (and, though none had inkling of it, because of the sin he knew of that lay between them, the sin that lived and moved and had its being in the person of the child Oona)— and still more who were angry with her be-

cause she came never among them, but was as one lost to the world, and she too with the second life in her, when she ought to be seeing and talking to older womenfolk—there was none among these who, in his or her heart of hearts, did not recognise that it is ever an idle thing for small wings to baffle against a great wind. *It was to be: it would be.* That was the unspoken refrain of all thoughts: the undertone of all comments.

The tragic end of Anabal Gilchrist, the doom that had fulfilled itself for Torcall Cameron: what was either but apiece with the passing of the ancient language, though none wished it to go; with the exile of the sons, though they would fain live and die where their fathers wooed their mothers; with the coming of strangers, and strange ways, and a new bewildering death-cold spirit, that had no respect for the green graves, and jeered at ancient things and the wisdom of old —strangers whom none had sought, none wished, and whose coming meant the going of even the few hillfolk who prospered in the *màchar*, the fertile meadows and pastures along the mountain bases? *It was to be: it would be.*

Among the old there was exceeding bitterness. An angry and a brooding pain frowned

in many hearts. But, alas, what good to meet the inevitable with wailing? What had to be, surely would be. Old wifeless men, old childless women, took comfort in that bitter-sweet saying of the Psalmist: " is iad iobairtean Dhé spiorad briste "—" *the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.*"

But, with the harvesting, the Strath-folk forgot for a while the very existence of the mountain-lovers.

Smitten with the strange rapt elation of their dream, Alan and Sorcha still went to and fro as though spellbound. Sometimes he herded the cows alone: as before, Sorcha milked the sweet-breath kine, singing low her songs of holy St. Bridget or old-world cadences rare and nigh-forgotten now as the *Fonnsheen,* the fairy melodies once wont to be heard on the hills and in remote places. But, though apart for a brief while, it was only to dream the more.

Yet, strange to say, Alan knew in his heart that this could not endure. It could not be for over long: God, soon or late, lays winter upon the heart, as well as upon the song of the bird, the bloom of the flower.

Nevertheless, he had no trouble because of this. There is, at times, in deep happiness, a gloom as of dark water filled with sunlight.

While the glow is there, a living joy, the gloom is no more than the quiet sorrow of the world.

Often, of late, he had noticed upon the hillside, upon brier and bramble, fern-covert or dwarf-elder, that indescribable shadow of light, visible too at full noon in that golden weather as well as at the passing of the sun: that glow of omen, known of Celtic poets and seers in far-gone days. The first line of a fragmentary rune, come down from one of these singers, who walked nearer to nature than does any now among the sons of men, was upon his lips over and over, because of this thing:

"*Tha bruaillean air aghaidh nan tom.*"
"*There is boding gloom on the face of the bushes.*"

Once only the gloom lay upon him, the gloom that is upon the mind as a dark cloud upon a field of grain. What if ill should have come to Sorcha?

He turned, and went swiftly home. The gloaming had fallen, and Sorcha was sitting before the flaming peats, with clasped hands and dreaming eyes. She was crooning, half breathing, half crooning, a song, low and sweet against his ear as the noise of a running brook heard in sleep as one fares by

green pastures under a moon strange and new in a strange land. And the song was one he had not known, not since he was a child, and heard Morag, the wife of Kenneth, foster-brother of Fergus Gilchrist, sing it before, in a day of mourning, she brought forth her firstborn:

"An' O, an' O, St. Bride's sweet song 'tis I am hearing, dearie,
Dearie, dearie, dearie, my wee white babe that's weary,
Weary, weary, weary, with this my womb sae weary,
And Bride's sweet song ye hear it too, and stir and sigh, my dearie!

"Oh, oh, leánaban-mo,
Wee hands that give me pain and woe:
Pain and woe, but be it so,
'Tis his dear self that now doth grow,
Leánaban-mo, leánaban-mo,
'Tis his dear self one day you'll know,
Leánaban-mo, leánaban-mo!

"St. Bridget dear, the cradle show,
My baby comes, and I must go,
Leánaban-mo, leánaban-mo!
Arone! . . . Arò!
Arone! . . . Arò!"

He had stood in the shadow, silent, listening with awe and a strange joy. His heart

yearned to go to her, but he knew that a mother's first tears were in the dreaming eyes, and that it was not for him, nor any save God, to be seeing them.

So Alan turned, and went up through the dusk to the low green summit of Cnoc-na-shee, a brief way from the sheiling. And when he was there he looked and saw nothing in all the light-gloom sky but one star low in the south—*Reul-na-dhuil*, the star of hope. Peace was in his heart. He kneeled down and made a prayer for Sorcha, and the child she bore, and for him too. And when he rose, and went home, and looked back at green Cnoc-na-shee, he saw there for a moment a figure as of an angel, shining bright.

Night and day they were alone there. Murdo the shepherd was up at the high sheiling on Ben Iolair, and rarely came to Màm-Gorm save to help with the kye, or do what was needed about the steading. Oona, too, was seldom seen of them; and of late, even she had not always come at sunrise for the food Sorcha placed for her on the bench by the door each morning. As for Nial, he was for long seen of none, save Oona, and where and when that was no one knew.

As October waned, the day of the mountain lovers became more and more a life of

joy. Hand in hand they would sit on the bench in the sun, happily content: or dream, hand clasping hand, before the glowing peats. It was in vain that Murdo, fearing "the quiet madness," reproached Alan, urging upon him that he should go down into Inverglas and see to the sale of the cattle and the sheep. The young man shook his head, smiled gently at the shepherd, and once at least murmured these ominous words: "There is a time for all things, and it is my time to be still. I have peace."

Sorcha, being heavy with child, could not now walk far, and indeed cared little to go beyond the door-bench, or, at farthest, to the green slope of the hillock of Cnoc-na-shee. Her beauty had not waned because of her trouble. Her eyes had grown more large and beautiful: wonderful stars of light to Alan always—stars that shone out of infinite depths, wherein his soul could sink till it reached that ninth wave of darkness which is the sea of light beating upon the coasts of heaven.

So, ever and again, glad with his joy and ungrievingly gloomed because of the shadow that day by day wove a closer veil about his spirit, he not grieving because not in himself knowing the mystery, he went out upon the

hillside or into the forest. Often it was, then, that he heard the singing of Oona in the woods at sunrise and during the hot noons. Sometimes now, too, when late-wandering through the forest at gloaming, he saw afar off the still figure of Nial crouching by the tarn, or seated with bent head among the flags and rushes of the drought-dried pools. More than once, as he went home by the remoter glades, he heard the elf-man chanting wildly among the pines at night.

It was on one such evening that, returning with his mind strangely troubled because of the soulless man of the woods, and of his futile quest and the bitter wrong and pity of it, he was met by Murdo with startling news. Sorcha had had a vision; and, being wrought by it, had fallen into premature labour. But she was not alone. He, Murdo, had brought his foster-sister, Anna MacAnndra, back with him from the clachan by the Ford of the Sheep: for as he had gone down with some young ewes that noontide he had seen a look like death in Sorcha's face, so white and drawn was it with sudden pain. Anna, he added, was a leal friend and dear to Sorcha, so that all was well.

And that night, in truth, the child of their great love was born to them. A night it was

of pain and joy, of agony and rapture. But when at last the long-waited dawn came—when, as the woman Anna said, there was no more need to fear, for the death-hour of woman in travail was well past—there was deep breathing of quiet happiness upon the sleeping mother, deep slumber of birth-weariness upon the child that lay against her breast, deep peace in the heart of Alan.

It was not till the eve of that day that Sorcha told him of her vision. She had been sitting in the sun upon Cnoc-na-shee, when she was amazed to see three people pass from the forest and make their way up the hill. Because of the noon-glare she could not discern who they were, though each seemed vaguely familiar. Dark in the glowing light, their figures were visible till they reached the ancient stones beside the cairn of Marsail. There she thought they passed into the long hollow beyond; but, when she looked again, she saw that they were now four in number, and that they were coming down the kye-path to Màm-Gorm. Her heart had begun to waver; but it was not till they were half-way down that she recognised the white faces of them: Torcall her father and Marsail her mother, Anabal and her man Fergus. All

four walked in peace. And she heard a thin song in the air, that may have been from them or may have been behind her: a song that said, "*Beannachd do t'anam is buaidh*," "Blessing to thy soul, and victory," "Blessing, blessing to thy soul, and peace!" But still the spirit in her was strong, for why should she fear, dead, those whom she had loved, living?

But as they drew nearer she saw the woman Anabal waving her arms slowly as she advanced, even as the prophesying women of old did before the Lord; and, so waving, she chanted a rune. And the rune that she chanted was the *Rune of the Passion of the Mother*, that no man has ever heard since time was, and that has been in the ears of those women, only, who are to lose life in the giving of a life unto Life. So, hearing this rune, she fell sobbing, with the pains already upon her: and, but for the coming of Murdo with Anna, she would have borne her child on Cnoc-na-shee, the fairy hill—and who knows but its doom might have been that of Nial the soulless?

This vision, Sorcha added, she would not have told to any one had she felt the death-breath enter her as the child was delivered; but now that the boy was born, and was so

fair and lusty, blue-eyed and golden-haired as his father had been before him when he too was a breast-babe, and, too, that all was well with her, she told it. Moreover, sure, no harm could come of a song of peace: and as for the *Rune of the Passion of Mary*, it was no more than an idle tale, that saying of Anna MacAnndra's and of other women, that whoso shall hear it shall surely die within the birth-month.

And because of her smiling lips and loving eyes, and of the fair, lusty child whose little hands wandered clingingly about the white breast of Sorcha, Alan believed that the ancient wisdom was an idle tale.

When the dark fell, and pinelogs were thrown upon the redhot peats, the two talked in low, hushed tones, with eyes that ever sought each other lovingly—dreamed and talked, whispered and dreamed, far into the night.

Then, with close-clasping arm holding her child to her bosom, as though in her exceeding weakness—a weakness nigh unto death, now that it seemed to float up to her from within, rather than descend upon her from above—she feared her white blossom of love might be taken from her, Sorcha sank suddenly into drowning sleep.

Sitting by the bedside, with his hand stroking or holding hers, Alan revolved other thoughts than those of love only.

Passing strange, passing strange, this mystery of motherhood over which he brooded obscurely. And, truly, who can know the long, bitter travail of the spirit, as well as the pangs of the body, which many women endure—except just such a woman, suffering in just that way? Can any man know? Hardly can it be so. For though a man can understand the agony of birthtide, and even the long ache and strain of the double life, can he comprehend the baffled sense of overmastering weakness, the vague informulate cry against all powers that be—Man, overlord of the womb: God, overlord of men. How many women have prayed not to Him, but to the one Pontiff before whom all thoughts bow down, worshipping in dread: to that shadowy Lord of the veiled face whom some call Death, that Woman of the compassionate eyes whom others call Oblivion, because of the poppied draught she gives the weary to drink, and the quiet glooms of rest that she holds in the hollow of her hand, and the hushed breath of her that is Forgetfulness.

Thoughts such as these, though in crude

words and simple symbols, were in Alan's mind.

No, he knew: never again could he even listen to men jeering at birth. He, though he had come to her virginal-pure, yet feared Sorcha's eyes at times, because—though not knowing for what it was—of the deep-buried spiritual anathema which, in the gaze of the purest and noblest of women, affronts the chained brute that is in the man.

Ah, do men know, do men know—many a woman cries in her heart—do men know that a woman with child dies daily: that she wakes up to die, and that she lies down to die: and that even as hourly she dies, so hourly does the child inherit life? Do they know that her body is the temple of a new soul? What men are they, in any land, who profane the sacred altars? Death was of old the just penalty of those who defiled the holy place where godhood stood revealed in stone or wood or living Bread: shall they go free who defile the temple of the human soul?

"Sure, sure," Alan breathed rather than whispered, with some such thought as this in his mind, "sure I am the priest of God, and she there my temple . . . and lo, my God!" . . . and with that he leaned over and

kissed the little rosy fingers, and the hot tears in his eyes fell upon Sorcha's breast, so that she stirred in her sleep and smiled, dreaming that a soft rain was falling upon her out of the Healing Fountain of Tears that is in the midmost Heaven.

It was at sunrise that the door opened and Oona entered. The child was wet with dew which glistered all over her as though she were a new-plucked flower.

"Ah, birdeen, it is you!" whispered Alan softly, lest the sleepers should wake. "See, I have been dreaming and sleeping all night before the peats."

Oona stared at the bed, where all she could see was Sorcha's pale face among its mass of dusky hair.

"Is it true, Alan? That . . . over there . . . is *that* true?"

"It is true, dear."

"Are you *sure* that a baby has come to Sorcha?"

"It is Himself that sent it."

"Alan, has it a soul?"

"A soul? . . . Yes, sure no evil eye is upon it, to the Stones be it said! But why do you ask that thing?"

The child sighed, but made no answer, her

gaze wandering from Alan round the room, and then to where Sorcha lay.

"Why do you say that, Oona? It is not a safe thing to say: sure, it is not a good wishing. Who knows who may be hearing, though I wish evil to no one, banned or blest!"

"I see no one," Oona began calmly: "I see no one, and how can *no one* hear? But I will not be for saying an unlucky thing: sure, you know that, dear Alan. *Happiness be in this house!* . . . And, now, I will be going, Alan, for I . . ."

"Going? *Hush-sh!* wait, Oona, wait: sure, you will be wanting to see the little one?"

"I want to see Nial."

"Why?"

"He must not come . . . just now."

"Why?"

"At dawn we went up to the top of the hillock, for the 'quiet people' are ever away by then, it is said. And we prayed. I prayed, and Nial said whatever I said. And then, at sunrise, we rose, and went three times round Cnoc-na-shee south-ways, and each time cried *Djayseeul!*"[1]

[1] *Deasiul:* "the way of the south [*i.e.* of the sun] (to you!)" From *deas*, the south, and *seol*, way of, direction. The common Gaelic exclamation for

"And what was it you would be praying, Oona?"

"That no soul might be in the body of Sorcha's baby."

Alan stared at her, too amazed at first to be angry.

"What madness is this, lassie?"

"Sure it is no madness at all, at all, Alan! It is a good thought, and no madness. . . . For . . . for why. . . . There is poor Nial; and when Murdo met him on the hillside last night, and told him about Sorcha, Nial found me out by calling through the woods like a cuckoo, and sure a good way too, for there are no cooaks now; and then he and I hoped the baby would have no soul . . . and . . ."

"Hush-sh! Hush-sh! Enough! enough! *bi sàvach!* I am not being angered with you, because of the good thought that was in your heart. But say these things no more. Come; look at Sorcha and the child."

With a light, swift step Oona moved across the room. Silently she looked into Sorcha's face; silently she stood looking awhile at the child.

Alan had no word from her, to his sorrow.

luck, in the Highlands at any rate. Many old crofters still, on coming out of a morning, cry "*Deasiul!*"

Steadfastly she stared; but breathed no whisper even. Then, with a faint sigh, she turned, moved like a ray of light across the room, and, before he knew what had happened, she was gone.

Bewildered at the child going thus quietly away, he went slowly to the door; but she had already vanished. So small a lass could soon be lost in that sunlit sea of green-gold bracken.

For some days thereafter he caught at times a faint echo of her singing in the woods. Once, in a gleaming silver-dusk, he saw the imprint of her small feet, darkly distinct in the wet dew, underneath the little window behind which Sorcha lay. But she did not come again.

It was on the eve of the morning that Oona came that Nial also, for the first and last time, beheld the little Ivor—so called after Ivor, the brother of Marsail that was Sorcha's mother, the noblest man Alan had ever known; "Ivor the good," as he was called by some, "Ivor the poet" by others.

Alan was out, talking to Anna MacAmndra, when Nial stole into the room. One hope was in his heart: that Sorcha slept.

With gleaming eyes, seeing that this was so, he drew near. The sight of the little

white child, close lain against his mother's bosom, made a pain in his heart greater than ever the stillest moonlit night had done—a suffocating pain, that made him tremble.

He drew a long breath. He, too, he knew, had once been small, perhaps white and sweet, like *that*.

Was it possible that so small, so frail a thing could have a soul? Sure, it could not be. If not, should he not take it, and keep it by him in the forest, till the day when it could be mate to him, Nial the soulless? But if . . .

His hand touched the skin of the little rosy arm. The child opened its eyes of wonder full upon him.

They gazed unwaveringly, seeing nothing, it may be: if seeing, heeding not. Had it cried, even, or turned away its head; but, no, its blue, unfearing eyes were fixed upon this creature of another world.

It was enough. With a low, sobbing moan he turned and stole unseen from the room, and so out on the hillside, and past that praying-place of Cnoc-na-shee, where so vainly he and Oona had urged that which might not be; and so to the forest, that was the home of the wild fawns, and of the red fox, and of Nial.

None, save the child Oona, ever saw again

the elf-man that was called Nial the Soulless: none, though Murdo the shepherd averred that, once, as he passed through the forest in the darkness of a black dawn, he heard a wailing cry come from a great hollow oak that grew solitary among the endless avenues of the pines.

It was far within that first month of motherhood, presaged by the secret rune heard of Sorcha, the *Rune of the Passion of Mary*, that only women dying of birth may hear: it was within this time that an unspeakable weakness came upon Sorcha.

Day by day she grew frail and more frail. Her eyes were pools for the coming shadows of death.

Strange had been their love: strange the coming of it: stranger still was their joy in the hour of death.

For this thing upbore her, that was to go, and him, that was to stay: Joy.

Not vainly had they lived in dream. Sweet now was the waning of the dream into long sleep. Sweet is sleep that will never stir to any waking: sweeter that sleep which is but a balm of rest.

For they knew this: that they would awake in the fulness of time.

When, for the first time, the doom-word passed her lips, Alan shuddered slightly, but he did not quail.

"I am dying, dear heart!"

"Sorcha, this thing has been near to us many days. It is not for long."

"And thou wilt look to thine own dark hour with joy?"

"Even so."

"And our legacy to this our child . . . shall be . . . shall be . . ."

"It shall be Joy. He shall be, among men, Ivor the Joy-bringer."

No more was said between them, then, nor later.

It was in the afternoon of the day following this that Sorcha died. She was fain to breathe her last breath on the mountain-side. Tenderly, to the green hillock by the homestead, Alan had carried her. Soft was the west wind upon her wandering hands; warm the golden light out of the shining palaces of cloud whence that wind came.

He was stooping, with his arm upholding her, and whispering low, when, suddenly, she lifted the little Ivor toward him. Quietly she lay back against the slope of the green grass. She was dead.

Alan quivered. All the tears of his life

rose up in a flood, and drowned his heart. He could not see the child in his arms; but he did not sway nor fall. Sorcha strengthened him.

Then silently the wave of grief, of a grief that might not be spoken, ebbed. Out of the sea of bitterness his soul rose, a rock with the sun shining upon it.

Slowly he raised the child above his head, till the wind was all about it, and the flooding glory of light out of the west.

A look of serene peace came into his face: within him the breath of an immortal joy transcended the poor frailty of the stricken spirit.

When the words that were on his lips were uttered, they were proud and strong as the fires of the sun against the dawn:

"*Behold, O God, this is Ivor, the son of Sorcha, that I boon unto Thee, to be, for all the days Thou shalt give him, Thy servant of Joy among men.*"

There was peace that night upon Iolair. But toward dawn—the morrow of that new, strange life wherein Alan and the child, with Oona mayhap, were to go forth toward those distant isles where, as Sorcha had seen in a vision, Ivor's ministry of joy was to be—a great wind arose.

The hills heard, and the moan of them went up before it. The mountains awoke, and were filled with a sound of rejoicing.

Through the darkness that lightened momently it came down the glens and the dim braes of bracken. Many waters felt the breath of it, and leaped.

The silences of the forest were as yet unbroken. Unbroken of the wind, at least: for, faint and far, there rose and fell a monotonous chanting, the chanting of a gaunt, dwarfed, misshapen figure that moved like a drifting shadow from pine-glade to pine-glade.

But as dawn broke wanly upon the tallest trees, the wings of the tempest struck one and all into a mighty roar, reverberatingly prolonged: a solemn, slow-sounding anthem, full of the awe of the Night, and of the majesty of the Day, hymning mysteries older than the first dawn, deeper than the deepest dark.

And after the passing of that great wind the forest was still. Only a whisper as of the sea breathed through its illimitable green wave.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

BY MRS. WILLIAM SHARP

Pharais, the first book written by William Sharp over the signature of "Fiona Macleod," was published, in 1904, by Mr. Frank Murray (Derby), as the third volume of the "Regent Library," (of which *Vistas*, by William Sharp, was the second volume). It was reissued, in 1907, by Mr. T. N. Foulis. In America *Pharais* was originally published by Messrs. Stone & Kimball (Chicago), as the first volume of their "Green Tree Library," and was reissued by Messrs. Duffield & Co. in 1906.

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